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A CHILD'S DEVELOPING SENSE OF THEME

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A CHILD'S DEVELOPING SENSE OF THEME

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
Degree Doctor of Philosophy in the
Graduate School of The Ohio State University

BY
Susan Stewart Lehr, B.A., M.A.

* * * * * * * * *

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To Kristin, Matthew and Hans
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CHAPTER ONE

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

The major purpose of this study is to characterize the nature of the child's sense of theme as it develops across several age levels, and to determine the role of literature in that development. This study will: 1) describe how children develop an ability to identify and generate theme, 2) determine whether exposure to literature affects children's abilities to identify or generate theme, 3) determine whether using realistic fiction or folktale genres affects the child's ability to identify or generate theme, and 4) determine whether the use of literature as a research stimulus affects children's abilities to identify or generate theme. Theme, as it relates to processing information and understanding what is read, can be defined as the overarching concept of meaning which the reader constructs during and after the reading of a passage. Theme is at a higher level of abstraction than is plot or main idea. The need to establish research exploring the process of identifying theme in literature and to further conceptualize the child's developing sense of theme initiated this investigation.

Applebee's (1973) pioneering work in exploring the child's developing sense of story through an analysis of the child's own stories is the impetus behind this investigation. His notion that a child's
"earliest interpretation seems to be that a story is something that happened in the past, a history rather than a fictional construct" (pg. 116) leads one to question how the young child represents story in memory and whether a child can actually pull out meaning before he or she is able to ascertain fact from fiction. White’s (1954) diary of her daughter supplies no evidence that a child questions the truth of a story before the age of four. How then do young children represent story in memory and what meanings do they attach to the varied forms of literature to which they are exposed? As the child matures how does this representation of meaning alter? That the child actively constructs meaning in early experiences with stories demonstrates that the process is more than just a function of memory (Paris, 1975; Paley, 1981; Cochran-Smith, 1984). A child may remember the details of a story and may even be able to retell the story in a sequential fashion, but can the young child define the overarching concept of meaning which fluent readers construct? Do young children have the ability to articulate this type of generalized abstraction? A question which emerges then, is how children develop an ability to state theme.

Applebee (1978) states that the ability to state theme develops throughout the preoperational and concrete operational stages of growth in the child. In the preoperational stages of growth the child has difficulty formulating a general framework using the elements of the story (Applebee, 1978), thus one would not expect a child in the preoperational stage to be able to verbalize a thematic statement about the story. As the child matures and experiences with stories and the world build, the child moves into a concrete stage of operations where
Informational categories and hierarchical organizations of knowledge are expanded. Bartlett (1932) suggests that new schemas are constructed by readers to network new meanings and existing schemas are reconstructed to match present perceptions with incoming data which does not mesh with the child's understanding of the world. In Piagetian terms the child is constantly assimilating and accommodating this new input.

The perspective presented here is that children continually push at the parameters of their worlds. As new information is processed by the child, old data undergoes constant change to match new perceptions and new information. What the young child knows is volatile because of this continued input. Thus the term "child as active learner" has continued importance in cognitive psychology. Schema theory accounts for this view of the child's learning (Rumelhart, 1975; Minsky, 1975; Bobrow & Norman, 1975; Rumelhart & Ortony, 1977; Schank & Abelson, 1977), for as children are exposed to new knowledge they increase their networks of understanding and broaden their abilities to construct meaning. Consequently the child's ability to focus on meaning in a story must be highly affected by his or her own perspective and understanding of the world. Pearson (1981) suggests that broadening a child's conceptual knowledge may be more beneficial in facilitating prose comprehension than specific skill practice, and that better comprehension may arise from helping children to better understand their world. He defines reading as building bridges between the new and the known.

Two positions have emerged regarding the child's ability or inability to identify main ideas, gist statements or themes. [The terms are not
used interchangeably; however, since research on theme is limited, research exploring the child's ability to identify main idea will be discussed and the terms will be defined in chapter one and discussed at length in chapter two. The first position suggests that children may recognize main ideas of passages read, but not be able to construct main idea statements. The second position states that children can interpret main ideas in narrative passages. In support of the first position Applebee found that in children's own storytelling 2-5 year olds do not typically generate a thematic center or a clear focus. Baker and Stein (1981) suggest that the young child's sensitivity to main ideas is below his or her level of awareness. A child may tacitly comprehend central thoughts and recognize thematic statements, but be unable to produce or construct main idea or gist statements when required to do so (Baumann, 1981). This inability to initiate main idea has strong support in recent studies with elementary school children which suggest that the child may be able to recognize main ideas, but lack the ability to generate central thoughts of prose passages without specific instruction (Otto et. al., 1968; Tierney et. al., 1978-79; Dunn et. al., 1979; Taylor, 1980; Baumann, 1981).

Juxtaposed against this body of research are a series of studies which claim that elementary age children can interpret main ideas in narrative passages (ICHristie et.al., 1975; Danner, 1976; Meyer, 1977; Brown et.al., 1977; Waters, 1978; ). Baumann explains the disparity between the two positions by asserting that whereas children are familiar with narrative forms, they are unfamiliar with nonfictional textual forms (Boljonis & Kaye, 1980). In essence, this assertion claims
that children have existing story schemas and are able to "plug" into brief narrative passages due to prior knowledge of how stories operate. Familiarity with story schemes may facilitate interpretation of main ideas. The identification of a main idea is merely a verbalization of what is already known and familiar.

In contrast to the success of the children in studies which used narratives, other studies suggest that children have no internal structures for accessing top level ideas from lengthy prose passages, such as textbooks. It is not until about the fourth grade that textbooks are widely used in classrooms (Baumann, 1981). Children do, however, typically have experiences listening to and reading stories. This exposure to stories would have a tendency to increase prior knowledge of narrative forms (Flood, 1977; Mandler and Johnson, 1977; Stein, 1978; Butler, 1980; Whaley, 1981; Cochran-Smith, 1984), thus allowing the child to form narrative categories and generate organizational structures for recall of main ideas. These categories would initially be based on literal elements or main ideas, but would later become more symbolic representations of meaning and move toward thematic statements.

None of the studies mentioned have explored the preschool or kindergarten children's awareness of theme or their abilities to generate meaning. Studies by Baumann and others imply that the kindergartner is not capable of identifying theme by the exclusion of this age group from consideration, as well as research findings that grade school children have difficulty in generating main ideas, gist statements or theme. As a result, the basic assumption is that a five year old can not generate a theme from a story, but can recall high level information
from stories. Kindergarten children have not been asked to link stories with similar themes, nor have they been asked to generate thematic statements about books. Furthermore, elementary aged children with wide exposure to literature at home and in school have not been evaluated in terms of ability to generate and identify themes from books. There is a need, then, for research exploring theme with young children to resolve this issue.

Textbooks and experimental materials are the dominant research tools used in main idea research. No research exists which contrasts the theme generating abilities of children with a high exposure to children’s literature to those with a lower exposure to children’s literature. Thus a need emerges to explore how children represent meaning with book experiences, and how children learn to verbalize ideas in encounters with literature. Many have suggested that the process must be taught and is not derived naturally (Tierney et al., 1978-79; Baumann, 1981), but what has not been explored extensively is how this learning develops and how an exposure to literature of a high quality might facilitate or influence this type of learning.

Within a study of this nature, there are two issues which must be addressed. The first deals with the nature of the text and the second the relationship prior experience to literature might have on theme generation ability. A major problem with the narrative and prose research is the structure of the passages used. Generally highly structured sentences or paragraphs were presented to children which contained apparent single themes, using as few as four simple sentences. Other passages included simplistic narratives of a low interest level,
extraneous information that students were forced to ignore or narrative elements which were rearranged or deleted. The findings (Otto, et al., 1968; Thorndyke, 1977) generally support the idea that simple sentences uncluttered with clauses and complex structure, or passages which do not delete or rearrange elements are more accessible to students in identifying main ideas, gist statements or themes. This was true across grade levels. However, real books with extended plot, setting, characterization and multiple themes were not used. One of Baumann’s conclusions states that narrative discourse remains to be explored in terms of the child’s ability to identify main idea.

Since real books with pictures were not used, and prepared or tape recorded passages were presented within the narrative studies cited above, it could be argued that these were unnatural book sharing experiences for the children tested, and that as a result the studies were unable to elicit natural responses. Cochran-Smith raises the following questions: "What is the role of picture "reading" in prose comprehension? How do pictures and texts work together to convey narratives? What is the nature of the task of getting information from pictures? How does this task compare with the task of getting information from print? It seems problematic to separate text and pictures, rather than to treat them as integral parts of the beginning reading/comprehension process" (pg.11, 1984). The picture book "conveys its message through two media, the art of illustrating and the art of writing. Both media must bear the burden of narration in a well-designed book that reflects its whole character" (Huck 1979, p. 112). Furthermore, picture books ... are dependent upon their sequencing and the overall design of page and book,
and so suffer a loss of meaning and significance when separated and displayed" (Marantz, 1977, p. 148). Is it possible that meaning was altered or diminished in research situations where children heard or read brief narratives without benefit of illustrations?

It has been shown that learning to pull out hierarchical information is important, even crucial to further learning (Stein & Glenn, 1975; Meyer, 1977; 1980; Stein, 1978; 1977). Children who are equipped with schemata for identifying main ideas or story structure in discourse seem better able to recall or process that knowledge, than children who have difficulty identifying main ideas of passages read, because they are able to produce implicit inferential information (Tierney, et al., 1978-79; Trabasso, 1981). Thus they can establish and extend interpretive frameworks and make predictions about what is read. Warren (1979) refers to this as text-connecting and slot-filling. This would suggest that children with many book experiences may be better able to recognize and generate language about their understanding of theme.

If teachers are aware of how children actively construct meaning from early encounters with stories and how children develop this constructive process in the elementary school years it would seem that such knowledge would assist them in planning experiences with books in the classroom. Furthermore, such knowledge would have a tendency to broaden definitions of what story comprehension is, based on the child's own interpretations and perspectives.
THE MEANING OF THEME

The idea of theme is hardly new. Recent studies have used terms such as main idea and gist of story, while others have used the term theme. The concept of main idea or gist statement ties meaning specifically and concretely to the passage read. For example, THE THREE BEARS can be characterized as a story about three bears who leave home for awhile and return to find that an intruder is present, or it can be seen as a story about a little girl who goes into the house of the three bears uninvited, wreaks havoc and is finally scared away. This essentially is a main idea statement which includes elements of plot.

In contrast, theme is an abstraction and can link stories and ideas in more general terms. THE THREE BEARS can be viewed thematically without including specific elements of plot, such as a story about not going where one is not invited, the perils of disobedience, the perils of leaving one's house unlocked or the complete lack of regard some hold toward the property of others. Different interpretations are possible, but couched in abstract terms they become thematic statements about stories. Thus the word theme was used to identify statements about stories which step back from the literal interpretation of the story. It is also likely that children who are accustomed to retelling and summarizing aspects of stories will generate statements which include literal aspects of the story. Student answers were analyzed and thematic content was determined to reflect various levels of response.

The term theme strictly speaking includes the definition related by Luken in A CRITICAL HANDBOOK OF CHILDREN'S LITERATURE (1982).
comment about either society, human nature, or the human condition. It is the main idea or central meaning of a piece of writing" (pg. 101). Huck (1979) writes that "the theme of a book reveals the author's purpose in writing the story," and that "most well written books may be read for several layers of meaning—plot, theme or metaphor... Theme provides a dimension to the story that goes beyond the action of the plot" (pg. 6). Thus gist statements and main idea statements can be conceived of as interpretations tied more directly to the plot, whereas thematic statements are more generalized ideas that spring from concrete ideas.

Research conducted by Otto et al. (1968) with main idea gave students lower ratings for responses that did not link general and specific interpretations of texts, yet according to Luken and Huck a thematic response might be conceived of as a more general response to a story. As defined by Applebee this type of response (a movement toward generalization rather than including specific content of the passage) is at a higher cognitive level of the child's development. Thus research that penalizes students for responding at a higher level of abstraction may be questioned.

In responding to a passage about birds building nests in various places, a child was ranked lower for responding "where birds like to build nests," than for "Birds build nests in different places" (Otto, et al., 1968). The former was considered too general, whereas the latter was considered a correct blending of general and specific information. It might be argued that these are semantic equivalents or that the former is actually a tidier statement than the latter through its use of a title-like clause. In such instances the emphasis in the present study
was on meaning rather than a specific expectation for a set of words. Also, since readers bring a variety of perspectives to the reading task, interpretation was not confined to one set meaning. If children interviewed gave theme statements and supported such statements from their own perspectives, the statements were accepted as viable themes if they did not conflict with the plot of the story. This allowed for an analysis of how children encode meaning from stories without penalizing the child for interpreting the world from his or her own level of cognitive growth.

For example, one might interpret LITTLE WOMEN as being a story about loving relationships within a family of diverse personalities. Another might say that the book is essentially about the hardships of growing up in a one parent family during a war. Both would be correct and would capture a central meaning of Alcott's book. Both, however, come at the book from different perspectives and probably reflect two very different sets of background knowledge and prior experience. This latitude in accepting the reader's thematic response is critical in understanding how young readers interpret what they read. Response studies indicate that the child reads a book uniquely in terms of his or her interaction with text (Golden, 1978; Applebee, 1978; Hickman, 1979; Benton, 1979; Galda, 1980; Hepler, 1981). This study's definition of acceptable thematic response reflects recent findings in the area of children's response to literature and builds upon current theory which suggests that readers bring their own world views and perceptions to the act of reading. The result is a transaction which occurs between the reader and text within a context. This transaction, according to
Rosenblatt (1938) focuses upon the generative role of the reader. She views the reading act as an interaction between the text, which is an encoding of the author's intended meaning, and the reader, who brings his or her own interpretation to the experience.

Pearson (1981) raises the question of the confounding use of the term "main idea." Main idea is related to theme of selection (Korman 1945, cited in Yendovitskay, 1971); main idea refers to "most general" ideas in the text (Otto, Barrett & Koenke, 1968); main ideas are those ranked as "most important" (Brown & Smiley, 1977). There is certainly a large amount of overlap in these conceptualizations of main idea which coincides with definitions of theme. Part of the problem resides in the fact that readers do not respond in identical terms. Some use elements of the selection to generate theme statements, whereas others speak in more abstract terms. Some use phrases or titles and others form sentences. Some are lengthy, others stress brevity. Furthermore, there is the problem of multi-layered themes or ideas which go beyond the concept of main idea. Therefore, alternate themes may be proposed that are also viable. Knowing the author's intentions would perhaps be helpful, however, reading is a highly selective and personal process. The reader chooses to stress that which is relevant to him or her, thus it would appear that the notion of main idea cannot be static. Perhaps most helpful is Pearson's statement that "the term 'main idea' is but a main idea for a polygot of tasks and relations among ideas" (p.124, 1981). Researchers do not use the terms uniformly, thus the term main idea will be used only in chapter two for purposes of building a background of information regarding research already conducted. The term theme
embody the concepts to be explored in this study. Where applicable theme will be used to discuss research which specifically uses the term theme.

DEFINITION OF TERMS

The following terms will be referred to throughout the study according to the following definitions:

Theme. Theme is a generalized statement of meaning which is the overarching concept or idea behind a story. This concept is an abstraction which is one step removed from the story itself; therefore, a thematic statement can be made which links books with a similar generalized meaning.

Revised Huck Literature Inventory. The Huck Literature Inventory, originally published in 1960, was updated to include current titles. Four sections comprised of well known literary works included nursery rhymes, poetry, folktales and fables, and modern stories. As a result of the updating, book titles which were determined to be less known or not widely available were deleted from the inventory and books, well known, widely available and written and illustrated in the past 20 years were included to give a blending of older and current titles. The Revised Huck Literature Inventory will be referred to throughout the study as the RHLI. The RHLI will be discussed in greater detail in chapter three, under Instrumentation.

Instantiation of meaning. Instantiation is the process of automatically pulling out that information which is needed to make sense or lend clarity to a situation encountered. For the purposes of this
study. Instantiation is used in reference to the act of reading. This accessing to information undergoes constant refinement and revision as new data or input is perceived by individuals, and is consequently value laden. This concept, seen as a necessary part of the reading process, will be discussed in detail in chapter two under THE CONSTRUCTION OF MEANING.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

A limited body of research exists exploring the child's ability to identify and generate theme in narrative and prose passages. None exists using children's literature; consequently, elementary school teachers need to understand how children build meaning from reading and listening experiences with children's literature in a more naturalistic setting to implement effective literature programs. The primary need that was identified was to use literature within a natural elementary school context with a perspective that would stress patterns of development in children's generation of thematic meaning. The study was cross sectional and included kindergarten second and fourth grade children to determine whether the development of ability to identify or generate theme was developmental. The relationship between the child's exposure to literature and the child's ability to evoke theme was a primary focus of the study. Two different genres were included to determine whether this would affect the child's ability to identify or generate theme. The use of literature was included to determine whether this would act as a research stimulus to improve the child's
ability to identify or generate theme.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The primary purposes of this study are to develop a conceptual framework for analyzing thematic response to literature, to examine and evaluate the thematic responses of kindergarten, second and fourth grade children and to form a developmental perspective across those age ranges.

The following questions were explored:

1. How do kindergarten, second and fourth grade children verbalize themes heard in stories, and is there a pattern of thematic responses across age levels?

2. Will children be able to identify two books with similar themes?

3. Can children generate themes which match two books?

4. Will there be differences in ability to identify and generate theme between children with a high exposure to children's literature and children with a low exposure to children's literature?

5. Will the use of picture books make a difference in the child's ability to generate theme when contrasted to research that used text without illustrations?

6. Will the use of two different genres, realistic fiction and folktales, affect the child's ability to identify or generate theme?

The major purpose of this study is to characterize the nature of the child's sense of theme as it develops across several age levels, and to determine the role of literature in that development.
SUMMARY OF PROCEDURES

Subjects representing three age levels (kindergarten, second and fourth grades) were chosen from the upper and lower scores of a population of children in the same school who completed the Revised Huck Literature Inventory (Revised Lehr, 1984).

The children in the study lived in a middle class suburb of a large metropolitan city. Several tasks were responded to over a period of eight weeks from October to January. The researcher interacted freely with the subjects so that the book sharing sessions were not tense or unnatural, because the nature of the book sharing experience is such that the adult is usually not a stranger to the child. In experimental design this is not the case, thus every attempt was made to use a natural setting based on interaction as in the context of the classroom.

The two sessions involved the oral reading of three picture books to all age levels in small groups. Children were then individually interviewed. Books appropriate to each grade level were selected which exhibited well developed themes. Past research has used lower graded materials across age levels which has had a tendency to penalize the youngest subjects in terms of difficulty and oversimplify the task for older subjects. Examples are given in chapter two.

The children were asked to choose two books having the same theme. In the first task the child listened and responded. In task two an oral follow-up interview (based on a revised format originally written by Goodman & Burke) allowed the children to expand upon their choices,
which allowed for an analysis of the child's verbalization of theme. Two genres were used: realistic picture books involving everyday types of themes, and folktales involving more universal themes. In each genre three selections were chosen, two of which had strong linking themes (e.g. sibling rivalry), and a third selection, which was different. Therefore, the children attended two separate sessions, one for each genre.

Since theme is not an actual retelling of the story and involves a different level of comprehension the child was allowed to handle the book while formulating his or her ideas. This concept is based on observations by Hickman (1979) and Hepler (1981) which demonstrate the importance of allowing the child access to the book during response. This also removes the imposition of a memory demand on subjects (Baker & Stein, 1981). It is perceived by this researcher that such a natural extension of the book sharing event will lead to a higher level of thematic interpretation, since the child draws on memory as well as the physical book to analyze theme. Any scholarly analysis involves perusal of materials read and in this situation this is the task required of the child. As a result, there was no strict reaction times imposed on the child. Every attempt was made to create a natural setting wherein the child and adult shared a book experience. The researcher did not, however, prompt the child and supply the child with clues. The thematic statements were given by the child.

All children were asked to draw a picture and to include a caption telling what the whole story was about without access to the book while others were being interviewed, as a time delay activity.
The emphasis in these tasks was the expression of theme and the ability of children to link themes in narrative discourse by identifying books with similar themes. In essence, these were generating activities with no reliance on recognition of gist statements.

ANALYSIS OF DATA

In task one children's answers were tabulated as to whether thematically linked books were chosen. The interview process then generated original thematic statements which were compiled and compared across age levels through the use of a scale of thematic importance adapted from Otto's (1968) scale for main idea (Adapted Lehr, 1984). College students enrolled in an undergraduate children's literature course at the university rated the books for thematic importance, against which the children's answers were matched. Divergence in answers was acceptable if the child supported the statement with logical detail that was congruent with the book. The imposition of a rigid thematic interpretation of each book against which each child's statement would be measured conflicted with a view of the reading act as an individual transaction between reader and text. Consequently it was hoped that during the analysis of children's thematic responses certain developmental trends would emerge as to how a child pulls meaning from the book experience. The trends that emerged were analyzed through correlations and a 2 X 3 analysis of variance and have been incorporated into a developmental framework which corresponds to the child's cognitive growth and will be explored in chapter four.
SCOPE AND LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Specific findings of response within the present study were limited to the populations tested. The study was comprised of sixty children in twenty classrooms in a school with both basal and literature based language arts programs. Some of the techniques used in these classrooms may not be occurring in other school settings. For example, some of the classrooms use literature as a basis for instruction, rather than basal readers. This alone could make the children more open to the type of research conducted. Also the children in the informal literature classrooms were accustomed to visitors and other adults in the classroom. They frequently shared their work with visitors, thus they may have been more open to interaction with the researcher than children unaccustomed to having other adults in the classroom. All children tested may have had literature exposure in the home in varying degrees. In an attempt to control for this variable only the upper and lower scores of the Revised Huck Literature Inventory were used. Consequently it was hoped that any influence experience with literature may or may not have had on the child's ability to identify and state theme was considered apparent.

The researcher became a limited part of the setting and was perceived by participants as a university teacher who explores books with children. One cannot measure the effect this had on the social interactive patterns of the participants, nor can one measure how this may have influenced the data.
SUMMARY

Since literature has not been used in exploring the thematic responses of children, the present study was designed to explore how 60 kindergarten, second and fourth grade children constructed meaning when reading or listening to stories.

A review of related theory and research forming a conceptual framework for the study is contained in chapter 2. Chapter 3 outlines the method and procedures implemented, as well as a description of instrumentation used for the study. Chapter 4 includes the findings of the study. Chapter 5 provides a discussion of the findings as well as conclusions and implications for classroom practice and suggestions for further research.
CHAPTER II
REVIEW OF THE RELATED LITERATURE

AN OVERVIEW

Recent studies have explored the child's developing sense of theme as it relates to generating or identifying main idea(s) in narrative or prose passages. How well children generate meaning as they read has been the main focus of many of the studies (Otto et al., 1968; Korman, 1945 cited in Yendovitskayz, 1971; Mal'tseva, cited in Smirnov et al., 1971-1972; Christie Schumacher, 1975; Danner, 1976; Baumann, 1981). Other studies have explored how well children can identify main ideas in passages (Brown & Smiley, 1977). Yet the question of theme remains largely unexplored, particularly in the area of using children's literature as a means of discussing theme. Studies exploring main ideas have generally used constructed materials and have not focused on the child's ability to conceptualize meaning from his or her own perspective in typical reading settings. The child's responses have typically been matched to "correct" responses. This review will begin with the child's conceptualization of the story, for it is the child's perspective of a story which reveals how meaning is structured. The chapter will be divided into five sections.

Part one briefly explores the child's concept of story from a developmental perspective. This traditional view of the child is based on
adult perspectives and largely ignores the child's perspective. This sets the framework for exploring how a child builds meaning structures during reading experiences.

In order to understand how that meaning is constructed it is important to review current models which attempt to describe the reading process. Part two describes the reading process from several different perspectives which has implications for the teacher's attitude toward the child's construction of meaning during the reading process.

Part three focuses on the construction of meaning during reading experiences. The product of reading, which is the representation of knowledge in memory, is presented in a discussion of schema theory. Schema theory is a conceptualization of knowledge accounting for the complex networking of concepts stored in memory (Rumelhart, 1980). This sets the stage for an exploration of how readers instantiate, or automatically pull out schema to fit contexts in texts.

As readers encode meaning, concepts not explicitly spelled out in texts are nonetheless understood and incorporated into a general frame for understanding. Thus how readers instantiate meaning will be elaborated. A reader's expectations, as well as the background knowledge of individual readers, influence what is read and how it is understood, therefore an understanding of how readers approach textual context is valuable. What frames does the reader bring to the reading act?

As readers search for meaning every effort is made to create cohesive text. The reader actively constructs meaning during the reading process. How this occurs depends upon what the reader brings to the
reading act as well as textual clarity. The reader makes use of inference to guide the structuring of meaning. As the reader poses questions slots are filled with information which completes the reader's understanding of the text, therefore, the strategies used in inferencing will be discussed in detail.

Part four presents a wide range of research which elaborates how the child becomes familiar with the structure of stories and how the child builds meaning from such encounters. Since stories have an inherent structure to which children are constantly exposed, expectations for stories are developed, inferencing patterns are familiar and story schemata exist which have distinctly defined conventional elements such as plot, character, setting, beginnings and endings. Children use these functions to facilitate the reading process. When story organization is manipulated or elements are deleted children will fill in the gaps with conventions that are familiar to them.

This ability to work with story elements aids the child in interpreting the themes of stories read. Much of the research conducted since 1968 has been limited to main idea and has left the identification of theme of passages a rather nebulous area. Main idea or gist statements have instead been the focus of the studies, which as already discussed, is a more concrete linking of ideas. Main idea research, which suggests that children have limited facility with identifying and generating main ideas of passages read, will be discussed and then the generation of theme will be explored. Research will be cited to support the notion that children can and do abstract thematic material as they read. Next the relationship between text and illustrations will be
explored, since this study asserts the importance of using natural materials in natural settings with children in order to elicit thematic responses.

Lastly, in part five, the child's perspective, with which the discussion began, will be explored, citing examples from Paley's (1981) observations of kindergarten children speaking and listening to stories during class time. Their perspectives of meaning in stories sets the tone for what will follow, for it is the child's perspective that is crucial in understanding how meaning is constructed as children read.

WHAT IS A CHILD'S CONCEPT OF STORY?

Developmentally the child moves from giving concrete answers, up a scale of abstraction, to generalizations. This view of the child has not been taken into consideration in the measuring of thematic responses. Applebee's (1973) significant work describing the preschool child's sense of story would suggest that the young child has difficulty generating a story framework with a clear thematic focal point, or center. Authoring a story with a theme or moral or identifying the theme of a story is the last of the stages which Applebee identifies. He parallels this to Vygotsky's notion of "true concept," (Applebee, 1978) and the example he cites is that of a child aged 5 years 8 months. The implication is that the younger child has great difficulty generating such a narrative, and that narratives prior to this stage of development lack true theme. It would be interesting to analyze the stories of children exposed to literature on a regular basis from the first year of life, and compare the stories of these children to Applebee's collection of stories.
Applebee's research did not explore the children's abilities to identify the themes of their own stories nor did he read aloud to participants, but rather he based his conclusions on analyses of the stories which the children produced orally as well as responses of children to known stories, such as LITTLE RED RIDING HOOD, common sayings such as "when the cat's away the mice will play," or fables such as "The Blind Man and the Elephant." Vygotsky (1971) has argued, based on his experiments with young children, that before children form concepts they use pseudoconcepts, which on the surface are similar to concepts, but are actually based on perceptions. Blocks of one color may be grouped together not because the child can abstract the concept of red or yellow, but because the child concretely perceives that the blocks comprise a set. As Baumann (1981) and Baker and Stein (1981) have suggested the child may be unable to generate theme or main idea, or as in this case the concept that blocks belong together because they occupy the same color set, but the child may well be able to identify the concept or idea.

When Applebee asked children to tell about a story they knew he found that the typical response of the six year old was a retelling of the story. Twenty seven percent of the six year old children interviewed would not respond to that question because they were worried that they might answer incorrectly. This type of response coincides with Piaget's preoperational stage of development, and Flavell's notion of "an isomorphic step-by-step mental replica of concrete actions and events" (Flavell, 1963, p.158). Children of this age typically focus on action when
recalling a story (Stein & Glenn, 1979). Applebee argues, based on children’s own oral stories, that there is “little or no reorganization of events into superordinate categories or more general schematizations; the child has great difficulty in integrating individual elements from the story into any sort of general framework” (Applebee, 1978, p.93). He states that it is not until concrete operational stages that the child can form symbolic representations which involve hierarchies of categories and subcategories. He also found that preadolescent children were unable to verbalize themes for familiar stories, common sayings and fables.

One child's response (age 10:1) when asked to tell about LITTLE RED RIDING HOOD was a concise summary of the story which concluded with this sentence: “Now Little Red Riding Hood can go and see her grandmother as often as she likes” (Applebee, 1978, p.95). The child has perceived correctly that the threat of danger has now been removed from the forest. This information is an inference based on understanding one of the themes of the story—that danger lurks in the world. Thus the child has constructed meaning solidly based on the thematic content of the story. Good comprehenders remember top level structures because higher level information is more easily identified (Meyer, 1977&1980). If such information is placed early in the text the theme can be established early, thus allowing the reader to build a context to construct meaning. Such is the case in this fairy tale. Early on the mother warns her child of the danger in the forest, and of the importance of staying on the path. The young reader matched what was known and perceived with what she encountered in reading, thus illustrating that comprehension is selective, as found in Steffenson et al. (1979). This child instantiated
her knowledge structures regarding the world and inferred after a reading of the text that Little Red Riding Hood would now be safe to visit her grandmother as often as she liked. Marshall et. al. (1978-79) found that fluent readers such as this infer complete text bases, thus making surface to deep structure inferences.

Using a Piagetian perspective, Applebee discusses the egocentrism of the child in terms of his or her inability to communicate effectively based on the needs of the listener. Thus he argues that the child will not necessarily justify a chain of reasoning or be aware of contradictory conclusions. Other alternatives are that the child may not comprehend the instructions of the researcher or perceive the questions as they are intended. Applebee talks about the child’s syncretistic linking of memorable incidents in the story rather than conceptualizing the story as a whole. One example shows a six year old child responding to LITTLE RED RIDING HOOD unfavorably. "Why didn't you like it? "He eats the grandma" (p.99). Piaget refers to this as centration, focusing attention on a single detail and neglecting other important aspects (Applebee, 1978). Nonetheless, the child may be focusing on the violent nature of the wolf in an extremely concrete manner without being able to articulate this directly. The child’s use of the word "he" rather than "the wolf" demonstrates his unclear use of reference. In essence, violence is a clear focus of this fairy tale and the child has identified that theme implicitly, but does not generate a thematic statement. The same is true of Joe’s answer (age 5:10), when he responds negatively to THE THREE LITTLE PIGS with “they get all eaten up” (p.99). He too, has captured the core of danger that lies central to the story, that of going out into the
world and attempting to make a life for yourself. Perhaps a child's perspective would necessarily stress the unreadiness of going out into the world and leaving the nurturing environment of the home. The child's construction of meaning would be that of fear—fear of leaving home, fear of the unknown, fear of striking out alone and taking care of self. This understanding of the child's perspective is crucial in learning how children construct meaning.

Traditionally comprehension of story and comprehension of thematic content have been viewed as static components, comprised of acquired skills which could be isolated and tested. The notion that interpreting a story was negotiable or subject to the reader's own worldview and perspective were not thought to be valid assumptions to make about the reading process. Rosenblatt's breakthrough book, LITERATURE AS EXPLORATION, published in 1938, challenged traditional notions regarding the text but was not widely accepted prior to the 1970's. Thus the research has continued to reflect this text centered perspective and has not made allowances for the child's own unique perspective, even when the child's observations are solidly based on the print itself.

The following review of related literature and research examines a theoretical framework upon which the child's meaning structures are built. From this base a discussion of research done in the area of theme is explored. Selected studies are examined which suggest the importance of the child's ability to identify theme in passages read.
THE READING PROCESS

A data driven view of reading holds that knowledge resides in the text and can be "unlocked" by the reader if the words are properly decoded and then encoded to gain meaning (Geyer, 1970; Gibson, 1971; Gough, 1972; LaBerge & Samuels, 1974; Gibson & Levin, 1975). Characteristics of this model of reading include the passive view of the reader, wherein the logic of the reader is used to sift out meaning from the text. One analyzes letters, words, phrases and sentences—all elements are decomposed to their smallest parts and put together sequentially to form a whole. This view of reading has prevailed in classrooms and has affected the means of testing and evaluating students by using predetermined meaning systems to measure responses of students. This approach to meaning is fairly easy to measure if the educators and students can agree upon the predetermined responses. This view has encouraged a right and wrong perpsective in evaluating comprehension. However, since meaning is fluid, one static answer will not, as has been suggested in the research cited, generally satisfy the demands of all readers. To read successfully in this type of model one must acquire the author's meaning. The stance taken more recently in research and evaluation of comprehending behavior suggests that is not always possible, nor is it desirable. Carried to an extreme a bottom-up model of reading would require readers to reach identical interpretations of text.

As a reaction to this theory of reading the top-down model was developed. A conceptually driven model begins with the reader and what
is contained in the reader's head. This approach is characterised as "knowledge based" (Goodman, 1967; Neisser, 1967; Kaplan, 1970; Kolers, 1972; Levin & Smith, 1973 & 1978; Neville & Pugh, 1976-77). Essentially the reader comes to the text with knowledge structures in the head. The reader relies on what he or she already knows to gain meaning. She samples the text, yet uses little visual data to gain meaning. The reader chunks information and uses redundant patterns of language to speed processing. Decoding and encoding are rather like one process. Critics of this approach state that it ignores the reader's ability to decode automatically with or without context (Stanovich, 1980). Fluent readers decode more quickly than less fluent readers regardless of contextual clues. Allington and Strange (1977) found however, that fluent readers will miscue to create meaningful text, whereas less fluent readers will read words accurately with meaning loss when manipulated text is used. Also the bridge between surface and deep structure in analyzing the miscues of readers is vaguely defined. Thus the link-ups to meaning are often nebulous.

Both models carried to their extremes ignore the strengths of each other. An interactive approach combines the strengths of both approaches, yet is closer on the continuum to the top-down approach (Ortony & Anderson, 1975; Schank, 1975; Rumelhart & Ortony, 1977; Spiro, 1977; Stanovich, 1980; DeBeaugrande, 1981). The strength of the interactive approach is the view that what is in the reader's head is processed at the same time as the words on the page are read. Multiple processing occurs from orthographies to lexical knowledge to syntactic knowledge to semantics. The reader may well use context to gain
meaning, but may stop to analyze the features of a word at a skills level. When one reads, one may have to reread a segment to gain sense for the whole. The poor reader may rely heavily on context to decode words, thereby limiting higher level processing, whereas the fluent reader can move efficiently to meaning. The fluent reader can infer more efficiently than the poor reader (Tierney et al., 1978-79), can reason more logically than the less fluent reader (Kavale et al., 1981), is not context bound in word identification (Allington et al., 1977), and is able to identify superordinate ideas more efficiently than the poor reader (Meyer, 1977).

A transactional view of reading rejects the interactive model and its basic assumptions are that:

1) the text is less an object than a potential that is actualized during the act of reading;
2) understanding arises out of the compenetration of reader and text and is thus something unique to that event;
3) text is an open system and therefore variation in interpretation is the expected response. (Siegel, 1983)

This view of the reading process is useful in that text is seen as an open system in which interpretation will necessarily vary among respondents. This component extends the interactive model beyond processing and suggests a reason for the disparity found among readers during the construction of meaning. Interpretation is therefore fluid. A component that must be clarified in the transactional view, however, is the specific notion that interpretation must be text-congruent. A reader and text come together to create a poem (Rosenblatt, 1978); however that newly created poem must be congruent with the text from which it
derives its potential if it is to be understood in light of the text from which it co-evolves if it is to be a transaction which has shared understanding. Part of the problem seems to be one of focus. Rosenblatt is more concerned with process, whereas the argument of other transactionists is concerned with product. Rosenblatt (1978) suggests that the reader must possess competence in the phonemic and syntactic systems of the language and be able to understand what the words stand for. She also writes about the reader’s ability to complete a decoding of the text. Therefore, Rosenblatt does not ignore the crucial role of the reading of the text. The reader must be able to complete the reading of the text at the word and meaning level in order to create the “poem.” Rosenblatt cites recent research that children’s errors in reading are often misreadings which occur at the level of expectation or frames formed for texts rather than misreadings of individual words (Rosenblatt, 1978).

Siegel (1983) suggests that a weakness of interactive theory is that during analysis in comprehension research propositions or meaning units can be coded as errors or intrusions. She views this duplication of the text as a rigid measure of comprehension in interactive models. Rather, it can be viewed as text-congruency, much in line with Rosenblatt’s theory of the role of text as it relates to “misreading” at the expectation level. The problem with accepting the range of all interpretations for a text is that not all readers attend to what is written in the same manner. Some readers are unable to process certain information contained in a text. Consequently, the resulting interpretation will be limited by that surfeit of text based data. Therefore, not all interpretations are equally
error free. The fact remains that a new "poem" will be created by each reader regardless of accuracy of input, nonetheless distinctions of text-congruency are necessary when analyzing comprehension of readers. The level to which each reader is capable of responding to the text will be a direct result of the reader's ability to understand the complete text. Whereas transactionists challenge template matching during reading which results in uniformity of interpretation, the issue is more directly related to the role of the text. To what extent should comprehension reflect an accurate rendering of material contained in the text? To refer once more to the example of LITTLE WOMEN it can be seen that a multitude of interpretations are possible based on a reading of one book. The role of background knowledge will be explored in another section, but it is worth noting that background knowledge will cause the reader to focus on different aspects of the story. Interpretations will thus be directly influenced, however, any interpretation of the story must necessarily coincide with the text itself.

The implications for the teacher's attitude toward the child's construction of meaning during the reading process, from the interactive and transactional view are several. Meaning should be the goal of reading, which in itself should be purposeful. Meaning will vary for each reader, depending on the reader's own schema and the context within which the reader and text reside (Halliday & Hasan, 1980). And lastly, meaning resides in the text and in the reader's head, and is shaped by a context, and when meshed together a transaction occurs, that is a new "poem" is created; however, if the reader's ability to construct meaning is the focus, the resulting "poem" will necessarily be
text-congruent. This discussion sets the stage for a review of the studies which have explored how the child constructs meaning during the reading process.

THE CONSTRUCTION OF MEANING

Current theories of cognition view schemata as the "building blocks" upon which all information processing depends (Rumelhart, 1980). Any research which hopes to explore how children build meaning during the reading process must consider what schemata are and how they are utilized. Rumelhart (1980) writes that schemata are used in the interpretation of sensory data, in the retrieval of data from memory, in the organization of actions, in the determination of goals and subgoals, in the allotment of resources, and in the guidance of processing in the system.

The term schema first surfaced widely when Bartlett (1932) published, his book, REMEMBERING. Bartlett identified schemata as a network which constructs and reconstructs new meanings and existing schemas to match present perceptions with incoming data which do not mesh with an understanding of the world. His early work with his own students has been the impetus behind much of the recent research done in this area. Rumelhart and Ortony (1977) have developed the concept more fully in "The representation of knowledge in memory."

Essentially schema theory accounts for the complex network of concepts which are stored in memory. These generic concepts contain variables and are assigned values by individuals. The schema is a conceptualization of knowledge which includes objects, situations,
events, sequences of events, actions and sequences of actions, and contains the network of interrelations held among the constituents of the concept under consideration (Rumelhart, 1980). Any schema is necessarily limited or extended by the input available. Schemata are embedded within each other, make use of part to whole and whole to part processing. Thus as a reader encounters text that reader instantiates schema to fit with the textual context.

A clock in a bedroom will be tucked into memory with specific values of "clockness" attached to it—sits on bed stand, has alarm, glows in dark, makes noise in morning etc. (Anderson, 1977). One fills in the gaps as one reads and literally recreates the text (Iser, 1980). Warren (1979) refers to this as text-connecting and slot-filling. Instantiation is the process of automatically pulling out that information which is needed to make sense or lend clarity to a situation encountered, in this instance during the act of reading. If information is stored generically in a network of concepts stored in memory then the process of accessing that information is necessarily an extremely fast process. Furthermore, refinements and revisions are ongoing and constant as new data or input is perceived by individuals. Therefore readers can pull out concepts with values already attached. Authors cannot spell out all elements of a story. Some components must be understood to keep the flow of the narrative moving in a forward direction. The reader will instantiate the entire notion of bedroom clock if the clock is said to be located in the bedroom, without a specific description of a bedroom clock being necessary. A kitchen clock has different attributes than one located in the bedroom. The author, however, need not define the features of each,
because the reader draws inferences based on the instantiation of the correct schema, and fills in the gaps of the text. Individual values attached to the clock found in the bedroom may vary, but the essential function of the bedroom clock has cultural expectations already established. However, the farmer accustomed to awakening at dawn with the crow of the rooster may have different expectations for the bedroom clock. The concept is only operable if there are certain attached values which are socially defined and agreed upon. Fish (1980) argues that interpretations are communally determined. "Since all sign systems are social constructs that individuals assimilate more or less automatically, an individual's perceptions and judgments are functions of the assumptions shared by the groups he belongs to" (p.xxi). Bleich (1980) expands this idea by suggesting that the individual negotiates within that given framework. Consequently the young reader has not taken on the complete values of society, but is said to be in a formative stage of growth. Therefore, the child's instantiations of meaning may differ greatly from those of the adult.

The reader's expectations also influence the act of reading. Subjects told to read a narrative with a house buying frame of mind remembered different aspects of the story than those who were told to think as a thief would prior to being given the story (Pichert & Anderson, 1976). The former subjects tended to stress real estate advantages such as room size and access to schools or playgrounds etc., whereas the latter were preoccupied with hedges to hide behind and windows to crawl through. One remembers what one expects to remember. Memory is selective. One actively constructs text as one reads (Blachowicz,
1977-78). What is known is integrated with what is presented.

What one knows will also influence an understanding of text. Steffenson et al. (1979) found that Indians reading about an American wedding had no schema for something old, something new etc., rice, and white dresses. The reverse was also found to be true. American readers could not instantiate unfamiliar customs when reading about an Indian wedding. What this suggests is that schema are highly individualized. The constraints can be cultural or they can be more localized. How schemata are formed depend upon the experiences and perceptions of those experiences by the individual. In this experiment there were no American wedding schemata for the Indian readers to instantiate. The reverse was also true, so that the reading experience was perhaps frustrating, in that the readers either did not understand certain words or actions, and were unable to key in on words which had entire segments of meaning encoded in them. The reader's used comprehension selectively, that is, a match was made between what was known and perceived to what was encountered. Reader's may have been unaware of certain information unavailable to them, due to cultural differences.

In the search for meaning readers will generally make every attempt to create a cohesive text. Readers will add information to a text to create congruity (Spiro, 1979; Blachowicz, 1978-79), and if later given plausible information which conflicts with an unclear text the reader will reconstruct the text to fit the new information (Spiro, 1979). This search for meaning employs the use of inference. In Spiro's experiment with adults a brief narrative was presented which stated that an engaged couple disagreed on the desirability of having children,
quarreled and were eventually happily married. The conflict was left intact for the reader to process. Inferences had to be made as to the resolution of the two schema states—one of disharmony and one of harmony. The subjects were asked to recall the story as exactly as possible without adding any information. The results showed that subjects reconstructed the story and added information to make the story cohesive. Subjects “remembered” that the couple had sought counseling, decided to adopt, or hadn’t really had a serious argument. When the story was reversed and the couple did not marry the same reconstructive process occurred. However, when the story was presented without incongruent elements subjects made no errors in recall.

This bolsters the notion that the reader actively constructs meaning during the reading process. If a text is poorly written, the reader will still seek meaning, and apparently find meaning, but the content of that meaning does not necessarily reside in the text. This illustrates the active role of the reader in her search for meaning. Reading is not a passive activity, wherein the text is whole and the reader merely decodes. This type of research directly challenges the notion that all meaning is inherent in the text and not constructed in the mind of the reader.

Collins et al. (1980) write that “a central purpose of inference is to synthesize an underlying model which organizes and augments the surface structure fragments in the text” (p. 386). These inferences are guided by target structures that specify a priori constraints on the type model to be synthesized. The target structure acts as an organizational
principle for guiding a set of inference procedures" (p.386). In Spiro's study the subjects were given a target structure to instantiate specific schema.

Usually the reader must ask the questions which form the model which constrains the reading of the text. "Constraint satisfaction" is the process of forming a model by using answers to questions which lead to other questions about how schema interact with the model. If there is a fit the line of questioning will proceed. Choosing the right questions to understand a text may be the most critical skill utilized during reading. Collin's protocols do not tell educators how people choose questions during the process of making inferences while reading, but readers who ask the wrong questions do not find solutions. "By pinpointing the strategies that skilled readers use for dealing with difficulties in understanding, it should become clear what strategies unskilled readers must learn" (p. 386). How skilled readers formulate textual questions, how they employ strategies in the revision of their models and how they evaluate those models are valid concerns raised by Collins.

HOW CHILDREN USE THE STRUCTURE OF STORIES TO BUILD MEANING

How do children construct story schemata? By listening to many stories and building knowledge about how story events are sequenced children construct a set of expectations about how stories function. When this internal structure is tampered with understanding is often difficult to achieve (Thorndyke, 1977). As a child encodes, the story schema acts as a general framework where comprehension processing occurs (Mandler & Johnson, 1977). Furthermore, the framework acts as a
guide which signals that certain facts are to be kept in mind. The story structure also increases the predictability of what is read which simplifies processing.

Mandler & Johnson (1977) formulated a general story structure for simple stories based on Rumelhart's (1975) story grammar. They initially attempted to analyze stories using his original grammar, but found it inadequate because of its ability to handle only a narrow range of stories—those with single or embedded episodes. Mandler & Johnson define a simple story as one which has a single protagonist in each episode. They characterize the underlying structure of the story as a tree structure "which makes explicit the constituent structure and relations between constituents" (p.115). Events are related by their tree position and by the causal or temporal node connections. Other fixed or basic nodes include settings, beginnings, reactions, attempts, outcomes and endings. The grammar is lengthy and complicated and will not be elaborated in this text (see Mandler & Johnson, 1977, for a complete diagram of their story structure); however, the application of the story grammar and its implications for recall will be explored.

Mandler and Johnson's parsing of Bartlett's classic THE WAR OF THE GHOSTS is most helpful in understanding the difficulties in replicating Bartlett's research (1932) due to his use of an atypical story structure, wherein some of the incidents have no obvious causal connections and a rational order is missing. Bartlett took this folktale from an article by Boas (1901) but his version differs from those in the article. Mandler and Johnson also suggest that the story was intended for a different cultural audience. They also challenge, due to the same structural differences in
stories, some of the Piagetian research (1926), which maintains that children confuse temporal order as well as cause and effect relations during recall. This does not mean that children should not be exposed to a wide variety of story structures; however, it does suggest that for testing as well as research purposes stories should be chosen purposively.

Mandler and Johnson (1977) asked first and fourth grade students and university subjects to listen to two tape recorded stories and to later tell the stories through the use of spontaneous recall. The stories were structured to conform to the story grammar developed by the researchers. Two of the stories were versions of stories used by Piaget in 1926, which had been altered for clarity. Each of the stories used had propositions from one of the six major nodes from the story structure: settings, beginnings, reactions, attempts, outcomes, and endings.

Not surprisingly, the adults recalled more than the fourth graders and they in turn, recalled more than the first graders, suggesting a developmental perspective of recall. First graders tended to recall settings, beginnings and outcomes. They omitted the internal reactions of characters as well as story endings. Fourth graders showed similar results to those of the first graders and in addition the recall of attempts and outcomes was greater, but not significant. Adults lagged in their recall of endings and reactions but were able to recall the other nodes.

The results show that children are sensitive to story structure and use similar retrieval strategies to those of adults. The major differences between children and adults seem to be that children stress
outcomes rather than attempts and almost ignore reactions. This study did not use probed recall, but other studies have found that children can answer questions about reactions and attempts (Berndt & Berndt, 1975; Stein & Glenn, 1975). Children apparently focus on how stories begin and how outcomes proceed from actions, but this does not mean that they are unaware of such knowledge. Additions during recall produced interesting results. First graders made the fewest additions, but when they did, the additions were frequently irrelevant or fanciful. This usually occurred when the child lost the threads of the story early in the recall event. What this suggests is that the child was attempting to fill empty nodes, but had inadequate information to do so correctly.

Using Mandler and Johnson's story grammar and the idea of "proposition" (Thorndyke, 1977; statements in Stein & Glenn, 1979; Mandler & Johnson, 1977) to establish the notion of independent clause, Whaley (1981) found that third, sixth and eleventh grade children had expectations for story structure corresponding to the story grammar of Mandler and Johnson. In their responses to manipulated stories children expected categories from the grammar and included them. There were age related differences that corresponded to the findings of Mandler and Johnson. Since only average and above average readers were used in the study, the findings cannot be generalized to all readers. Similarly, Stein & Glenn (1977) systematically deleted categories and found that children tend to fill in the deleted category. Trebasso had similar results. (1981)

In their production of stories children were given a setting statement and asked to continue telling the story. Results showed that story elements consistent with existing grammars were constructed
(Stein & Glenn, 1977). Children also had strong expectations for stories, and comprehension suffered when these expectations were not met. This coincides with Whaley's work, as well as Trabasso's and indicates that in reading, oral and listening situations children have strong expectations for categories in stories.

A problem with some of the studies cited lies in the materials or methods used. To generate a developmental perspective low graded materials were used for all students tested regardless of age. For example, Whaley used stories at the second and third grade level. It is hardly surprising that upper level students would be more successful with the recall tasks than the first and second grade students. Would the previous researchers have found that college students had difficulty recalling internal motivation or stressed beginnings if appropriately graded materials had been used? Would probed recall have caused children to consider internal motivation of character in a way that free recall did not? In essence, did free recall indicate that young children do not consider internal motivation or beginnings, or did the method used preclude finding out what the children knew? Would the differences between first and fourth graders have been the same? Whaley points out the difficulties of presenting high school students with simple stories. Did this have a tendency to negatively effect the results? Would the use of real books with illustrations have made a difference? These are questions for further study.

To make a valid comparison it would seem necessary to include narratives appropriate to each age level. Taylor (1980), in her study of recall of expository text, used two identical passages that were altered
for difficulty for two grade levels. On the basis of this gradation of materials the results should more accurately reveal the structural expectations of readers or listeners by removing inequities.

Interestingly, Taylor's results for immediate recall would indicate that developmental differences do exist across age levels, despite the comparisons between skilled fourth grade readers and less skilled sixth grade readers. Delayed recall, however, revealed no differences between the two groups. Furthermore, and contrary to other findings (Kintsch & Keenan, 1973; Meyer, 1975; Waters, 1978), Taylor found that sensitivity to superordinate over subordinate concepts was not differentially recalled by subjects in the brief expository passage read. She suggests that this may have been due to the brevity of the selection used; however, passages used by Waters (1978) were equally brief, yet his results are contrary to those of Taylor.

Perhaps the differences in the findings of the above two research projects was in the content of the passages. The Taylor passage was about the different ways in which animals protect themselves. There was information that was probably new and interesting to the students. The Waters texts were more mundane and familiar topics such as a brief passage about life on a farm. Consequently extraneous details were more noticeable. For example, the farmer wore boots and tracked mud into a sparkling clean kitchen. Contrast this almost irrelevant material to the following. "The copperhead snake blends in with dead leaves and with sticks in the woods." This lower level information is presumably under the topic of camouflage, but could have a higher interest rating than a pair of muddy boots in a clean kitchen. It could be more of an
interest factor which accounts for the differences. A reading of the Waters passage reveals that it is a rambling and rather topicless piece filled almost entirely with extraneous information, contrasted to the Taylor paragraphs which are tightly written and filled with cohesive information.

Thematic Manipulation in Narrative Discourse

A comprehension model containing a hierarchical organizational framework of stories in memory, determined by grammar, and representing abstract structural components of plot has been proposed by Thorndyke (1977). (see also Bower, 1966 & 1976) His structural organization for stories is a modification of Rumelhart's grammar (1975) and is similar to Mandler and Johnson's with the addition of theme as a stated or implied goal for the main character to achieve. He views theme as "the general focus to which the subsequent plot adheres" (p. 80).

In experiments, Thorndyke manipulated story organization and found that comprehension and recall were dependent upon the inherent plot structure in the story, regardless of story content. Subjects tended to recall high-level organizational story elements over low-level details, and as Mandler and Johnson found (1977) a general structure was recalled rather than specific content as the story became schematized in memory.

Thorndyke manipulated story elements which altered plot structure by removing or changing the position of theme in narratives. The results demonstrated the importance of having an organizational structure for comprehension and memory with a standard hierarchy of goal-directed episodes. Furthermore, university subjects receiving treatment of
episodes. Furthermore, university subjects receiving treatment of NARRATIVE—AFTER THEME replaced theme statements in the traditional beginning position during recall. When thematic statements were deleted altogether recall suffered and comprehension was lower. Apparently understanding the overall theme of a narrative guides the encoding of meaning, and without such an overarching concept, comprehensibility of narratives is difficult to ascertain.

Interpretation of Main Idea

The research is not clear as to the child's ability to interpret the main idea of passages read. Applebee's work (1973) would indicate that 2-5 year olds do not typically generate clearly stated themes in their own stories. Rather his analyses show a progression of growth toward narratives with clear centers and thematic focus. Readers and listeners, however, face a different thrust for meaning. Constructing meaning during the reading or listening process is quite different functionally from generating a narrative with a clearly stated theme.

A series of studies with elementary school children would suggest that the child is better able to recognize main idea, but lacks the ability to generate central thoughts of prose passages without specific instruction (Baumann, 1981; Dunn et. al., 1979; Otto et. al., 1968; Taylor, 1980; Tierney et. al., 1978-79). Otto's early research with children in grades one through six tested whether children could conceptualize and generate a main idea in reading four constructed sentences (at first grade vocabulary level and also at each grade level) with one clearly unstated main idea. Grade placement and readability of the paragraph
were critical factors in determining quality of the responses, however he found that children's responses were of low quality based on his scale of rating. For example, 29% of the second graders were able to compose an appropriate main idea statement and 64% of the fifth graders were able to do the same. As mentioned earlier one of the problems with Otto's scale is its penalization of responses having more abstract information in the body of the answer. A correct answer was measured as one that contained both general and specific information relating to the text.

Answers which contain more abstract information are developmentally at a higher cognitive level than those which include literal aspects of the story. Applebee's work analysing the responses of children aged 2–17 suggests that the answer which is most developed is that which steps back from the piece and speaks in more general terms. The Purves-Ripere system refers to this stage as "interpretation" which is beyond the stage of perception, and is based on characteristics of the work. Interpretation involves generalization beyond characteristics of the work (Applebee, 1978). Applebee's four developmental stages in the formulation of response include:

1) Narration, which occurs in the preoperational stage, and lacks integration
2) Summarization, which occurs in the concrete operational stage, and involves categorization
3) Analysis of the structure of the work or the motives of the characters; understanding through analogy, which occurs in the formal
operational stage I, and involves identification

4) Generalization about the work; consideration of theme or point of view, which occurs in the formal operational stage II, and involves understanding of the work and its effect on the reader's own views

(Applebee, 1978)

Consequently, Otto's scale is not consistent with the child's abstract development and capabilities. Another analysis of his data using an upgraded scale might reveal findings quite different from those published. Another weakness with this body of research lies in the brevity and simplicity of the prose passages used. Regard the following passage taken from the study:

Some birds build nests under a roof.
Many birds like nests in trees.
Some birds even make nests in tall grass.
A few birds make nests inside wood fence posts.

To generate a main idea statement from this brief series of sentences is difficult because so little context is built for the reader. To expect a blending of general and specific information might not be warranted.

Contrasted to this study, Dunn's work involved the use of a lengthy prose passage which fourth and sixth grade subjects had to read and recall through writing. His findings indicate that children with superior reading ability can recall subordinate level information equally to that
of superordinate level information, thus contesting Meyer's findings (1975; 1977). The main points of the 174-word passage (constructed at fourth grade level) were not emphasized, to make the test more rigorous. Subjects were asked to write all that they could remember from the passage with no emphasis given to main idea, and they were not allowed access to the material.

The findings in no way indicate that students are unable to generate main idea statements. The results indicate that better readers recall more information at lower levels of importance when asked to write all that they can remember about a passage. Furthermore, the average readers remembered fewer details and recalled more superordinate ideas, perhaps indicating that although they cannot remember as much as the more fluent readers, they are able to generate the most important ideas of a passage. Also, one of the pivotal pieces of information contained at a lower level happened to be an item which served as an argument for a higher-order semantic relation (Dunn, 1979), and was thus recalled by the better readers.

Dunn suggests that by dichotomizing recall data into high and low categories Meyer ignored recall from the specific levels and potentially masked differential recall from the various reading ability groups. Her use of a highly signalled passage may have made the task easier for less skilled readers to encode and retrieve information which they may not have fully comprehended.

Tierney (1978-79) probed his subjects more directly when testing the recall of a prose structure by using interview techniques based only on information already given by subjects and an oral retelling of
everything remembered. Tierney, using Frederiksen's Taxonomy of Text-Based Inferences, made a distinction between explicit information contained in the basal selection and in the reader's response and implicit information not in the text but inferred by the reader. Rating the structural importance of idea units to the theme was achieved by using Johnson's method (Johnson, 1970) of ranking proposition to theme of passage. This method makes use of pausal units by dividing a passage into idea units.

Results showed that poor readers are less complete in their recollection of propositions than better readers and in their ability to generate interpropositional structure. There was no proportional difference of the inferential information to the total information of good and poor readers during recall. Comprehension of the children was perceived to be constructive and abstractive "for the purpose of acquiring a meaningful interpretation based upon their own schemata" (Tierney, 1978-79, p. 539).

Readers recall more explicit information than inferred information during free recall and in probed recall are able to generate more inferential information, thus indicating that different processing strategies are operable. These differences vary across reading levels. Inference makes use of generation, whereas recall of explicit information involves retrieval. These findings are supported by Brown et. al. (1977), who state "that young readers rarely render inferences without probing" (Tierney et. al., 1978-79, p.548).

Baumann's research (1981) is perhaps most complete in terms of the generation of main idea with subjects. Using unaltered text, third and
sixth grade students were asked to read expository passages that were randomly selected from social studies texts. Developing a new procedure for identifying the main idea of a passage was designed, based on Johnson's (1970) concept of pausal units. The text was divided into independent and dependent clauses and some prepositional phrases. Two tasks were completed to isolate theme. Raters (undergraduate education majors) were asked to write down a single sentence that contained the main idea of the passage. Secondly, the raters examined the text and underlined the portions believed to contain the most important information (main idea). The answers were then grouped and main idea statements were matched. All passages were found to have one cluster of statements that represented the majority of responses. Underlined idea statements were also similarly clustered. Minimum scores had to be 50% or higher to be designated as main idea statements.

Students read the passages twice, had a filler task to control for short term memory (Kintsch, 1974; cf., Tierney et. al., 1978-79), and were then asked to "write a single sentence that tells what the whole story was about." Students were first given an alphabetical listing of all content words from the passage. Afterwards the subjects were asked to write all that they could remember about the story.

A second task asked students to read a second passage and respond by identifying a main idea statement from a list of seven statements, by completing multiple choice questions which probed for main ideas or details and by examining a list of 12 statements and determining whether they were main ideas, details or false statements. Findings indicate that students are able to produce main idea statements about
one third of the time. Ability to identify main idea in lengthy prose passages exceeds the child's ability to produce main ideas. A child may tacitly comprehend the main idea of a passage but be unable to produce a main idea statement (Baumann, 1981). Studies showing that children do produce main idea statements have used passages that are extremely brief in their construction (Danner, 1976) and are not indicative of textual passages that children must read and understand in the classroom. The present work supports the findings of Dunn et. al. (1979), Tierney et. al. (1978-79), and Taylor (1980) which showed that elementary students were unable to show "superior comprehension" in differentiating between superordinate and subordinate information.

When narrative prose is used, subjects show greater skill in comprehension of main ideas (Brown & Smiley, 1977; Christie & Schumacher, 1975). Children may have greater facility with narrative forms because of a well developed sense of story (Mandler & Johnson, 1977; Thorndyke, 1977; Stein & Glenn, 1975; Whaley, 1981). Furthermore, a study by Boljonis and Kaye (1980) suggests that children have little exposure to expository prose before they are introduced to content area books, which occurs around the fourth grade, and consequently have less knowledge about the structuring of nonfiction passages and are less adept at processing main idea (Baumann, 1981). Boljonis and Kaye (1980) found that fourth graders showed superior recall of information presented in a narrative passage compared to a nonnarrative passage containing the same information (Baumann, 1981).

Also Baumann asserts that those studies using a listening approach (Brown & Smiley, 1977; Christie & Schumacher, 1975; Danner, 1979; Meyer,
1977; Waters, 1978) have had more success with main idea comprehension than those requiring students to read selections. He hypothesizes that listening promotes main idea comprehension and reading does not. Hildyard and Olson (1979) found that students showed different patterns of comprehension after reading and listening. Main ideas were produced after listening and details were supplied after reading (cf., in Baumann, 1981). Future study needs to explore the effects of listening and reading as it relates to main idea. One possible reason for the difference is that reading is a more demanding task than listening and requires additional processing of the printed material.

Generation of Theme

Research has explored the child's ability to recall thematically relevant information after listening to narrative passages. Children as young as age five will delete irrelevant information and retell logically sequenced stories that are thematically centered. In the Soviet Union, Korman (1945) studied the narrative recall of 4-6 year old children and found that the material was related in a logically sequenced manner and that certain episodes containing lower level information were deleted in the retellings, particularly those which were not pertinent to the main idea of the passage.

To extend this work Christie and Schumacher (1975) tested kindergarten, second and fifth grade children, purposely including "the critical age (i.e., 7-8 years old) at which children are expected to begin abstracting relevant thematic information and recalling this information in a logical order (Piaget, 1926, 1928)" (Christie & Schumacher, 1975,
A 420 word narrative prose passage with 30 idea units was used. University students determined the thematic content of the passage and rated the ideas units in relation of importance to the theme. Students listened to the story and then taped responses. Idea units were judged to be correct if they did not alter the meaning of the story.

The results demonstrated the children's ability to recall more relevant versus irrelevant idea units in logical order, thus challenging the idea that children cannot abstract relevant thematic information before the age of 7-8, and supporting Korman's basic claims. Christie & Schumacher conclude that the kindergarten child is more capable of "abstracting and producing relevant thematic information than has previously been assumed" (p. 601). A fault with this conclusion is the fact that the stories were manipulated to the point that the intrusive detail was extraneous. Using real stories might reveal different results. Also, Christie & Schumacher did not apparently analyze the retellings for thematic statements or categorizations that children may have made, so the results indicate that children remember stories in a general manner. Whether the recall was at a level of retelling or summarization is not known. This information would be useful in analyzing the development of the kindergarten children.

Brown and Smiley (1977) had similar results with children's recall of the most important units in narratives presented. Recall of other levels of importance increased with age. Important to this study is the fact that Brown and Smiley used warm-up sessions to acquaint the children with the process of recalling the gist of the story. Also background knowledge about the narrative to be presented was shared.
with the experimental group. The control group received a false orientation. The results support what is already known about the importance of background information. Relevant orientation increased the amount of units recalled, whereas subjects with an irrelevant orientation recalled fewer idea units. The main effect of importance was also reliable (Brown et al., 1977).

Intrusions made during recall were divided into those which were considered theme relevant and those which were not. Results indicate that relevant thematic intrusions are a function of age. Younger children's intrusions are less related to theme, regardless of orientation. During probed recall children had a tendency to make more critical inferences than appeared in their free recall. Brown points out that the older children made more intrusions, and that technically the intrusions are errors. She refers to them as creative errors because they added cohesive threads to the story and ultimately made it more comprehensible. Young children also made these 'errors' thereby suggesting the constructive nature of the reading act based on what is known about the world. Providing an appropriate framework for a story enhances recall as much as a week after the orientation experience (Brown et al., 1977).

Similarly, Brown et al. (1977b) found that good readers in the seventh grade, reading and listening to two passages, recalled more of the idea units in the story, particularly those units that were structurally most important, than did their counterparts who were less skilled readers. This reveals that poor readers experience a "general comprehension deficit."
Fluent readers seem to have the ability to identify themes of passages read if the structure of the passage is familiar. This familiar framework allows the reader to instantiate schemata which facilitate the comprehension process. If the reader encounters structures which are not familiar, the process of understanding the author's intentions and pulling out a hierarchy of meaning is weakened, suggesting that children need a wide range of reading and listening experiences not confined to one particular structure.

Generation of thematic content is thought to be a developmental trend which entails minimally an implicit understanding of the structure to be understood. Children show facility with narrative forms due to their familiarity with such a format. As has been shown in their recall patterns of response, children are capable of remembering the main ideas in prose passages. They encounter difficulties, however, when reading lengthier nonfiction of a textbook nature.

Mal'tseva (1958 as cited in Smirnov, 1969) asked 60 second, fourth and sixth graders to compose an outline of a narrative text. Smirnov provides no elaboration of how this was accomplished, nor does he provide examples of passages used or writing samples, of particular interest which would be the outlines of the youngest group tested. At any rate, Mal'tseva found that subjects expressed "chief thoughts" of the text 46.3% of the time for second graders, 57.5% for fourth graders and 65% for sixth graders. These percentages are quite good considering the difficulty of the task involved, however more information would be needed to ascertain how the researchers gathered these outlines.

An interesting finding of the experiment was that children were
unable to express how to go about identifying the theme of a passage or how to check themselves as to whether the headings were correct. A major finding was that the children needed further instruction in the extraction of main ideas. This concurs with Baker and Stein's (1980) notion that the child's ability to express how she functions may be below her ability to actually produce the same.

As part of the continued treatment for subjects, Smirnov (1969) trained students to generate and identify main ideas in passages. They were encouraged to state main idea out loud in their own words and later to use these vocalizations as headings in their outlines. Furthermore, Smirnov trained subjects to explain how each operation was performed. In other words, the concepts were dissected in the hope that a type of metaawareness would occur. Specific instruction of this type in extracting main ideas from passages had a tendency to increase the independent generalizations of students trained. Making a child aware of what a main Idea is and how it can be identified seems to aid the process of generating theme in selections read.

Text, Illustrations and the Reading Process

Reading researchers have had a tendency to separate text from pictures in research situations in order to focus on the child's ability to read text without picture clues. In fact, many researchers have stripped the reading context completely by removing meaning from research situations, asking subjects to read words in isolation. This approach to reading is contrary to what is known about how children learn language, how they learn to read and how they build meaning while using language
to read or listen to stories. Schemata cannot be instantiated where no context exists. Part of this context is the book itself and this has been largely ignored in reading comprehension studies. Shuy (1981) states:

Research shows that good language learners begin with a function, a need to get something done with language, and move gradually toward acquiring the forms which reveal that function. They learn holistically, not by isolated skills (p. 106).

Part of this holistic context is the picture book itself complete with illustrations. Moreover, the social situation in which children hear books read involves a very specific cultural routine. In the United States the book reading experience in the home typically involves one or several children, usually siblings, a book with text and illustrations, a caretaker (often a parent, grandparent or babysitter), a close physical proximity (often the caretaker's lap or a child in bed with a parent perched nearby) and a familiar setting (often the child's home or that of a relative or babysitter). In the preschool setting many of the same home characteristics are present. The group may be larger, the setting may be an area rug, the teacher may sit in a rocker and she may share the pictures at the end of each page, although this is not always the case. This researchers's experience as a preschool teacher would suggest that the setting is not dissimilar from that of the home, except for the number of children involved. Even in the preschool setting children will seek to sit in the teacher's lap, will gather in as closely as possible and
will insist that pictures be carefully shown. Again, all is familiar to the child.

Another component of the lap situation may be the interactive nature of the experience (Cazden, 1966). Again, the child often responds freely to the illustrations and story as they are read aloud. Heath (1981) suggests that this level of interaction may be culturally determined. Flood (1977) has found that interaction during before and after the lap experience can elicit a higher range of response from children. As children grow older, the school book sharing experience changes. Often children will remain seated at their desks, and talk during the read aloud session will be minimized; however, one component essentially remains: pictures are shared during read aloud experiences and if they are not the children will frequently demand to see the pictures. Pictures are part and parcel of the early reading context. This is a cultural phenomena. To strip the context of pictures changes the social situation dramatically and must necessarily effect the child's ability to construct meaning.

Denburg (1976-77) suggests that reading is facilitated by pictures which enhance text. Although there are limitations to the procedures employed in the study what emerges is a generalization that readers integrate a variety of strategies in order to make sense of the text, which includes strategies incorporating illustrations. The fact that partial to full pictures and simple sentences were used in this study does not reflect a natural reading situation, nonetheless, Denburg's study indicates the importance of illustrations during reading.

Pictures have been criticized as text distractors (Fries et al, 1965; Chall, 1967; Samuels, 1968). Samuels' work with kindergarten children
Indicates that index cards without pictures are more often identified than those with pictures. Again, this type of situation significantly alters the reading context and has reduced reading to sight word identification. It can be argued that sight word identification is not actually a true reading situation. Meaning does not enter in; what occurs is an identification process void of comprehension. Fluent readers can process words automatically (Allington & Strange 1977); however, beginning readers employ different strategies and are more reliant on context to build meaning (Blemiller, 1970). The overall conclusion generated by this type of study has been that pictures interfere with sight vocabulary acquisition and consequently have no effect on comprehension when used with text. Based simply on sight word research, this type of conclusion may not be valid. Although there is no indication that pictures interfere with the process of comprehension they do enhance the child's attitudes towards reading (Samuels, 1970). Samuels nevertheless concluded, that pictures should not be included in textbooks.

Current research views illustrations as beneficial for reading and listening comprehension when the pictures give redundant or additional information to the reader (Rohwer & Harris, 1975; Branford & Johnson, 1972; Levin, 1981; Schallert, 1980). Subjects tested performed better on comprehension tasks which provided both textual and pictorial information. Levin concluded that content relevant illustrations facilitate children's learning of that content (p. 204).

Harste & Burke (1981) refer to the child who learns to read in a total environment. These "print settings" include size, shape, color, as
well as the configuration of the print itself, a semiotic system based on signs from the environment. The child may not recognize a STOP sign without the benefit of context (on the corner), color (bright red), shape (octagonal), and social situation (being in a car, approaching a busy intersection and coming to a complete stop). Children learn to recognize written symbols within the framework of meaning. Separating the text from the context can render the young reader helpless and unable to function at full capability.

In a similar manner, children hear stories in the context of lap situations with real books. To test the child's knowledge of meaning that context cannot be stripped to minimal components. Pictures are a part of that setting and therefore contribute to the child's building of knowledge structures. How that occurs is not yet known and is open for further study.

Siegel (1983) worked with fourth grade children in the area of interpretation by asking students to draw sketches of meaning for books read. By employing the use of art it was felt that meaning could be communicated that would not otherwise surface if language had been the only vehicle available. Sketching was chosen because it required students "to take the experience of reading as an object of thought" (p.9). Siegel discovered that the social situation effected the interpretation of what was read and how it was represented. The nature of sketching allowed a reader to reconsider the initial meaning-world and allowed the student to engage in signification rather than mere representation. That is, students related what was read to the specific context and moved from perception to interpretation. Children's sketches included signs and
symbols for elaboration and explanation, which were not solicited by the researcher. Children independently linked pictorial and written symbols in order to achieve clarity and organize ideas. Many of the written conventions used by the children were meaningful only in light of the cultural context. This suggests a natural tendency of children to use a wide range of signs in constructing meaning and attempting to communicate or share that meaning.

Color and size coding, for example, are only meaningful in a shared cultural context "when intertwined with other codes that they have the potential to signify" (p.31). For example, STOP in and of itself means 'don't continue on your present course,' but in conjunction with red and an octagon it has culturally encoded meaning, situation specific, distinct from any other use of the word stop. A distinction of semiotics (the study of sign functioning) is the notion of shared codes for successful communicative acts. This blends in well with Siegel's major finding, that interpretations by the children in her study cannot be explained in terms of reader and text alone, but instead require a consideration of the total reading event (Siegel, 1983). This has implications for the total reading context.

THEME: THE CHILD'S PERSPECTIVE

Paley (1981) has described the growth of her kindergarten class through an entire school year with observations about the cognitive growth and development of her students. Her observations include records of story book interaction as it relates to the encoding of meaning. Her goals for the children included the development of logical
thinking accompanied by the language skills necessary to articulate those thoughts. Consequently, she provided a classroom atmosphere which valued the statements of the children and encouraged oral language as a means of responding to books shared in class.

After Paley's kindergarten class heard the story of TICO AND THE GOLDEN WINGS by Leo Lionni, Lisa's retelling of the story went like this:

"There was a bird named Tico and he didn't have any friends because all his friends had black wings and they didn't like him anymore because he asked the wishingbird for golden wings" (Paley, 1981).

Paley (1981) relates in WALLY'S STORIES that she and the children did not agree about Tico. Whereas she viewed him as a nonconformist, the children unanimously viewed him as a "threat to the community." Their observations are congruent with the story and are revealing about their own perceptions about being different. Tico is viewed as being nicer with black wings. The children do not respond to the fact that Tico originally had no wings. Wally asserts that Tico thinks he's better with golden wings, reflecting the jostling position common to the young child. Jill states that Tico has no right to be better and that the wishingbird was "wrong" to give Tico golden wings. This world view wants all children to be on an equal footing. Deana puts the full blame back on Tico by arguing that he should not have asked for the golden wings. (Can this be construed as seeking the internal motivation of characters which Mandler and Johnson (1977) assert that the young child does not do?) In conclusion, Deana's position, consistent with her kindergarten world, is that Tico should share his golden wings and keep only one for himself (Paley, 1981, pp. 25-26).
In this conversation the teacher respects the consensus and does not insist that the children take on her view. Their views are not inconsistent with the story and although they may not reflect the author's intentions or that of the adult, they are thematically possible based on the story itself. The children's sense of theme for this story is: "Do not make your friends jealous." It is this perspective which future research must be open to explore, for it affords the teacher a serious look into the child's world and her or his attempts to construct meaning.

SUMMARY

In thematic research Applebee's concept of the child's development regarding level of abstraction has not been taken into account. The child has difficulty generating stories with clear thematic centers, nonetheless children's recall of stories indicates that thematic elements have been inferred by the child and assimilated into the child's concept of a particular story.

Traditionally comprehension of story and comprehension of thematic content have been viewed as static components. The idea that meaning is negotiable and highly individualized from the perspective of the reader was not considered a valid assumption and was not reflected in the related research. A review of how children construct meaning explores this concept more fully.

A brief review of three current reading models is helpful in understanding how the reader approaches text to gain meaning from print. Schemata are the building blocks upon which all information depends. Essentially schema theory accounts for the complex network of
concepts which are stored in memory. These generic concepts contain variables and are assigned values by individuals.

A reader instantiates meaning by pulling out schema with specific values attached to the concept depending upon the context. Author's do not elaborate all aspects of text, nor could they do so. A reader builds meaning during the act of reading by drawing inferences based upon the correct schema, a set of expectations for a particular concept stored in memory.

The reader's expectations influence reading, since what one knows will influence an understanding of the text as well as what one expects to find will shape the reader's understanding of the text. Readers will generally make every attempt to create a cohesive text. Readers will add information to a text to create congruity and will reconstruct a text to process new information which conflicts with an unclear text. This search for meaning makes use of inference. The reader's role is that of an active builder of meaning.

Inference is the basis of synthesizing an "underlying model which organizes and augments the surface structure fragments in the text" (Collins et al., p. 386). A reader continually asks questions which constrain the reading of a text and guide the reader toward a "target structure."

A data driven view of reading holds that knowledge resides in the text. If words are decoded and then encoded to gain meaning meaning can be unlocked. This view of the reading process dissects reading skills into its smallest components and views acquisition of these skills as being sequential, one building upon the other. Meaning is generally
viewed as static and one searches for the correct meaning.

The opposite view posits that all knowledge is contained in the reader's head and that the reader samples print and predicts meaning based on hypotheses formed at a conceptual level. Meaning is fluid and the reader builds a context for meaning. The reader chunks meaning and uses redundant patterns for language to speed processing.

A blending of both perspectives is interactive in nature and allows that the reader uses multiple processing. The reader may use context to gain meaning and may also analyze features at a skills level. Fluent readers move directly to meaning, can infer more efficiently than poor readers, are not context bound in word identification and are able to identify superordinate ideas more efficiently than poor readers. The fluent reader seems able to construct meaning more efficiently than poor readers.

Children build a fund of knowledge and expectations about how stories operate by listening to many stories. This story schema acts as a general framework where comprehension processing occurs. This framework acts as a guide which alerts the reader that certain information is pertinent. The structure also increases the predictability of what is read which simplifies processing.

Researchers have found that readers and listeners have concepts of story across age levels. Developmentally more is recalled with an increase in age, however, it would appear that young children can also reconstruct a story using an overarching conceptual framework with basic elements such as beginnings, settings and outcomes.

A problem with much of the research is its use of low graded
materials across age levels and a paucity of using real books. Studies with children indicate that they can identify main ideas in passages read and have a tendency to remember superordinate ideas which act as a frame under which subordinate ideas are slotted.

When elements of narratives are manipulated readers recall high-level organizational story elements over low-level details and a general structure is recalled rather than specific content because the story becomes schematized in memory. When manipulating elements relating to the theme of story results indicate the importance of having an organization structure for comprehension and memory with a standard hierarchy of goal-directed episodes. Theme statements were replaced in beginning positions during recall regardless of where the researcher placed it. Also, narratives without clear thematic statements were more difficult to recall and comprehension suffered. Understanding the overall theme of a passage guides the encoding of meaning.

Research suggests that children are able to recognize theme in lengthy prose passages with more facility than they are able to produce thematic statements. The research does not, however take into account that a higher level encoding of theme will contain less specific information from the passage read, than generalizations about the information contained in the passage. On a developmental scale this form of abstraction is at a higher level of cognitive growth.

Some of the weaknesses of research in this area include brevity of passages which allow little or no context to be built and use of free recall which does not require or specifically ask for thematic information. Probed recall reveals that students produce more
Inferential information, which is more directly related to theme and is generative in nature.

Extended research with content related textbooks reveals that students are not proficient at generating theme and are better able to identify theme statements. Using narrative structures contradicts the preceding research and implies that structures which are familiar to the child will be better understood than structures that are new. Listening may also promote main idea comprehension over reading.

Working with narrative researchers have found that children tested are able to produce information during retelling which deletes lower level information and propels the theme forward. Contrary to longheld notions about the young child's inability to produce theme, research suggests that children do recall thematically relevant material over irrelevant information. A problem with the research is a lack of detailed information about narratives used, or narratives which are too structured and include extraneous details which real books would not include.

Children do not necessarily interpret stories in the same manner as adults. Nonetheless, the child's perspective may be congruent with the information contained in the story, thereby reflecting a worldview consistent with her stage of cognitive growth. The child's sense of theme has been largely unexplored in the research and has potential for helping educators understand how the child constructs meaning.
CHAPTER 3
DESIGN OF THE STUDY

TYPE OF RESEARCH

The study addressed four basic questions from a qualitative perspective: 1) how skillful are children at identifying books with similar themes? 2) how skillful are children at generating thematic statements about books read and heard? 3) what is the influence of literary knowledge on the development of ability to state theme and 4) will genre or the use of children's literature as a research tool have any affect on the child's ability to identify or generate theme? The first question was approached by conducting a series of tasks which examined and compared mean performance for the identification of books with similar themes in a matching test. Independent variables included the age of participants and the child's exposure to literature. Participants received identical treatment despite exposure to children's literature.

The second question was addressed through a set of tasks which made use of a rating scale and an interview schedule. The follow-up interview had an open-ended format and was designed to elicit further response regarding oral identification of theme and was used with each child.

The third and fourth questions were addressed through the design of
the study which included testing children to determine literary knowledge and tasks involving genre related children's books.

**INSTRUMENTATION**

*Revised Huck Literature Inventory*. The Huck Literature Inventory, found to be a strong tool in predicting linguistic sophistication in Chomsky's work with children (1972) has also been shown to be a useful tool in determining a child's exposure to children's literature. It was determined for the present study that the inventory, originally published in 1960, needed updating to include more current titles. As a result, book titles which were determined to be less known or not widely available were deleted from the inventory and books, well known, widely available and written and illustrated in the past 20 years were included to give a blending of older and current titles. In order to determine which items would be appropriate a panel of experts in the field of children's literature were asked to read the new inventory and give suggestions. It was established at this point that the items chosen were widely available titles and reflected good books for children; therefore, face validity was positive. It was suggested that Shel Silverstein's poem "Jimmy Jet and the TV Set," included in his popular book *WHERE THE SIDEWALK ENDS*, be substituted for a Silverstein poem more widely known; however, item analysis after the pilot study revealed that this item discriminated between children with high and low exposure to children's literature and was subsequently included in the final test. A detailed discussion of item analysis for the inventory will be found under the discussion of the pilot study. Internal reliability was
estimated at .8 using a Kuder-Richardson 20 index of internal consistency.

Since the inventory is a sampling of books it includes 63 items taken from books determined to be readily available in libraries, classrooms and bookstores. The inventory includes a blending of traditional material as well as newer titles and identifies the child who reads and listens to literature in the home and at school. It is certainly not inclusive of all good literature available, but aims at the widest selection possible. Since home and school reading practices vary widely this inventory identifies children who are exposed to literature of a good quality and does not identify children who may have had experiences with other types of books or printed material, such as books available in grocery stores, comic books or children's bible story books. This variable will be explored during the discussion of the evaluation of student responses. Despite this limitation, it was necessary to establish a measure of students having a higher exposure or a lower exposure to children's literature to test the question of whether there would be a relationship between the child's exposure to literature and the child's ability to identify or generate theme. Thus the inventory was employed as a standard measure of exposure to literature. (see Appendix A for complete inventory)

Revised Goodman and Burke Interview. (Revised Lehr, 1984) A section of the Goodman and Burke Interview based on theme was adapted for the present study. Questions were modified to fit the needs of the tasks involving the identification of two thematically linked books and
the generation of theme statements. The interview asks a variety of questions which gets at the idea of theme from several perspectives. The first question asks what both of the books are about, what ideas they share. Subsequent questions asks for a summary of the story, most important ideas, author intentions and evaluations of why the story ended as it did. All questions are aimed at critical response based on the child's own perceptions of meaning. The interview is not a rigid format. Rather it is a guide used to elicit response. (see section on Procedures, chapter three, for table showing interview)

**Thematic Scale.** Text-congruent thematic statements were rated using a hierarchy for scoring which incorporates a blending of general and specific information in theme statements, based on an adaptation of Otto's (1968) scale for main idea and Applebee's levels of abstraction in recalling stories (Adapted Lehr, 1984). No scale existed which measured the abstraction level of theme statements and Otto's work with main idea provided a format which could be altered to determine thematic level. Since main idea is more directly tied to plot and action of story the Otto scale does not rate generalized statements at the highest level of abstraction. Therefore, it was necessary to include a seventh level which would code answers that were generalized statements of theme. The significant difference between the two scales is that the thematic scale has redefined categories to fit in with the development of theme as defined and differentiated from main idea in chapter one. Theme is a development of critical thinking in response to literature and can be articulated at different levels of sophistication. The Thematic Scale will be discussed in detail to provide a framework with which to
Interpret the findings of the study. Examples below are based on the answers generated for the books TITCH by Pat Hutchins and THE CARROT SEED by Ruth Krauss. Scale values are not weighted, but rather descriptive in nature, to allow a developmental perspective to emerge.

**THEMATIC SCALE**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SCALE VALUE</th>
<th>CATEGORY DESCRIPTION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>A statement which generalizes the content of the stories without including specific plot information from the stories.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**EXAMPLES:** The underdog comes through.
Patience and perseverance pay off.

**DISCUSSION:** Both statements are general statements of content, but do not specifically mention elements of plot or character. Rather they give an overarching concept related indirectly to elements of the story. The characters, their actions and results are clearly implied, but not mentioned. Note that both statements have different perspectives. Information is text-congruent. Term underdog implies characters in stories, but can be generalized to anyone. "Comes through" refers to successful completion of action, but does not specifically delineate action.

| 6           | Both general and specific elements correctly stated. |
EXAMPLE: Little people can be just as important as big and they can produce big things.

DISCUSSION: Statement includes blending of general and specific information from story. Information is text-congruent. General information refers to overarching concept contained in story, that of being important and doing something successfully. Specific information refers directly to elements of character, little people, and action in story, producing something.

5 One element correctly stated, the other too generally or too specifically stated.

EXAMPLE: Watching seeds grow and having faith it will come up.

DISCUSSION: One element is generally or specifically correct, whereas the other is too general or too specific. Information is text-congruent. In this case, the concept of growing and having faith is generally correct; however, the reference to seeds and it coming up is too specifically tied to the story content. The children in both stories are growing up, as are the seeds, and the reference need not mention seeds or children specifically. The response is too concrete and does not step back from the story with the implied concepts of growing and having faith in what one does.

4 Specific element correctly stated.

EXAMPLE: Both suggest that those certain children can't do
something or aren't big enough.

**DISCUSSION:** The statement is specifically correct with no generalization made from the story. The response remains tied to the content of the story and no attempt is made to generalize. Information is text-congruent. Furthermore, the statement does not take the thematic content of the story far enough. By stopping at a literal level the response contains no overarching concept about life in general. Adding a general component would take this statement to a different level by including information based on motivation or implied results of the action of the story. For example, "both suggest that those certain children can't do something or aren't big enough, but one does not have to give up and can succeed." The added words give a general stance which is removed from the literal elements of the story. It can stand alone as a generalized statement. A score of four is concretely tied to the story and can be conceived as a main idea statement which includes elements of plot.

**3** Irrelevant or incorrect material plus one element correctly stated or one element correctly stated and the other too general or specific or both elements correctly stated.

**EXAMPLE:** Growing plants. Little boys and girls have confidence in them.

**DISCUSSION:** This category includes irrelevant or incorrect material in the statement which is not directly related to theme or misrepresents the thematic content of the story, but has one or both elements correctly stated. Credit is given for generating thematic material, but is removed
for not processing information correctly. Information is not text-congruent. The irrelevant material contained in the statement above is that little boys and girls have confidence in them. This is a vague reference, which is not clear. What is it they have confidence in? "Growing plants" standing alone as a sentence is also not thematically correct. It is so specifically tied to the content of the story as to be informational rather than an abstraction of overarching concept containing specific material. Since the ideas of growing and having confidence are mentioned the statement has certain thematic elements contained in it, nonetheless, the ideas are simply not clearly stated.

2 One or both elements generally stated.

EXAMPLE: It's similar because this one's got big one's and this one's got small one's.

DISCUSSION: The statement is neither correct or incorrect as it stands. It is simply too vague to be measured. With added information it could be perceived as correct. As stated, however, it does not contain a clear thematic statement. It is at once too general and too specific. Both stories have big children and little children—a reference to "one's?" The statement does not elaborate and say what it is about big and little that is important here. The fact that this statement alludes to big and little without including incorrect material is what differentiates it from the next level. Information is not incongruent with text, nor is it necessarily congruent. One would have to determine a clear use of referents to determine correctness.
One or both elements too generally or specifically stated plus irrelevant or incorrect material or one or both elements too specifically stated or only irrelevant or incorrect material.

EXAMPLE: Cause both of them have blue. (Child matched TITCH and NEW BLUE SHOES rather than TITCH and THE CARROT SEED.)

DISCUSSION: Material is irrelevant and as a thematic statement is also incorrect, since choice is based on illustrations, as well as books not having common themes. Response is given credit for attempting to generate thematic statement; however, response contains no thematic elements and focuses on literal aspects of the illustrations.

0 No thematic response given.

EXAMPLE: TITCH and THE CARROT SEED have similar themes.

DISCUSSION: Response contains no thematic elements and no attempt is made to state theme.

PILOT TEST

Procedures used for the study were pilot tested in a school with a population similar to the school used for the study. The school itself was located in the same city and had a population of children with comparable socioeconomic backgrounds. Traditional second and fourth grade classrooms were chosen for the pilot test for purposes of establishing procedures and testing the quality and usefulness of the Revised Huck Literature Inventory. The pilot test helped establish the
final procedures developed for the study.

REVISED HUCK LITERATURE INVENTORY. The RHLI was administered first to an entire second grade class and a fourth grade class each comprised of approximately 20 students. It was pointed out by a teacher-observer that some children were unable to keep up as the test was read aloud due to the variance in the amount of time needed to select an answer. Since the number of subjects increases the variance in response time, the examiner decided to give the inventory in small groups in order to note and adjust to completion time, afford clarity in reading questions and to assure independent answers. It was decided that smaller groups comprised of 6-8 students would be appropriate, so that the test reader could better pace herself to the needs of the students.

Furthermore, due to the length of the test and the difficulty which some of the second graders encountered in the length of time to take the test, it was decided that the kindergarten children would be given the test on an individual basis and that the test would be reduced to 31 questions or half, for the kindergarten sample. To ensure that the high and low group for the sample populations would be equal the same half of the test was administered to all kindergarten children. New items were randomized separately from old test items to insure an equal distribution of all items.

A statistical analysis of the 63 item Inventory revealed that the mean equaled 39.54, the standard deviation was equal to 7.16, the high score was 51, the low score was 19, the median was 40 and the Kuder-Richardson 20 was equal to 0.803. The test was negatively
skewed (-0.56) with a standard error of measurement of 3.760. The scores indicated that all of the children tested had some knowledge of the literature included in the inventory. A score of 51 indicated a high exposure to children’s literature, in that given the wide range of titles available to read it would be unlikely that a child would come in contact with all of the titles on the RHLI.

Item analysis revealed that certain questions discriminated between high and low scores on the test and consequently the split-half reliability coefficient was lowered. Certain test items were able to differentiate between high scorers and low scorers. The test items were in different categories and could not be equally distributed. Reliability scores would have been higher if these questions were excluded; however, the questions discriminated between high and low scores in different categories or genres. On the other hand, certain questions were answered correctly by almost all of the respondents and could also have been deleted; however, to do so would have affected the lowest scores. It is useful to know that all 39 children were familiar with the rhyme "Little Miss Muffet," because this indicates a basic exposure to at least one Mother Goose Rhyme by all of the children tested. Thirty eight children knew "Hey, diddle,diddle!" This might result in a closer analysis of the test missing that item. Item two, "The Old Woman Who Lived in a Shoe," was missed by 14 students; however, 92% of the high scores answered correctly, whereas only 30% of the low scores identified this rhyme.

The poetry section revealed similar discriminating questions. Shel Silverstein’s poem "Jimmy Jet and His TV Set" was chosen from a popular
book by the author. 50% of the high scores answered this item correctly, but none of the low scores included identification of this poem. A possible explanation is that children with a lower exposure to literature have heard one or two of Silverstein's most popular poems, but have not read or heard other poems in his books, whereas children with a higher level of exposure have read through or heard his books and are familiar with the lesser known poem.

Similarly all of the high scores identified "The Owl and the Pussy-Cat" correctly, compared to 40% of the low scores. This is a traditional poem often included in early collections for children. The fact that all of the high scorers were familiar with this poem indicated at least a basic familiarity with children's poetry contrasted to the low scores which did not.

In part three of the Inventory fairy tales, folk tales and fables were explored. Most children identified the common fairy tales about the three pigs, little red riding hood and the three bears. However, a small number of children had no exposure to these tales. The relative difficulty of such items is extremely low, yet accumulating such knowledge from an inventory is useful in building a composite of the student's exposure to literature. Again, this type of question lowered the internal consistency of the test, yet it provided information regarding the student's most basic exposure to children's literature and consequently should be included.

The highest discriminator on the test is included in this section. Item 21 asks about the fable "The Tortoise and the Hare." 99% of the high scores (N=12) and 10% (N=1) of the low scores identified this item
correctly. (discrimination indices obtained D= 90.0)

Children with a high exposure to literature seem to know a variety of genres. There seems to be a paucity of genre variety for the low scorers. It would be of interest to follow up and determine the home and classroom reading patterns of both groups of children. The scores would indicate that the high group continues to read or listen to books in volume, as well as variety. The low scores indicate the opposite trend, but this cannot be established from the inventory alone. It is an indicator which would necessitate observation in the classroom and perhaps interviews with parents, teachers and children.

One of three most difficult questions on the test asked about Puss-in-Boots and was answered correctly on 7 tests, 4 of which were high scores, none of which were low scores. This is a lesser known fairy tale when compared with Cinderella or Snow White for example, and has not been made into a movie or Disney book. This would again indicate a child who had read or heard a story in an anthology which was not as accessible as those mentioned.

In part four which deals with modern stories, item 53, JUMANJI, received only 7 correct answers 4 of which were high scores, none of which were low scores. This is a recent Caldecott winner and the author has begun illustrating in the past decade. He is perhaps not as well known as others and his work has a high appeal for older children (grades 2-5). Picture books are traditionally shared with younger audiences.

Item 55, MR. GUMPY'S OUTING, received 7 correct answers, but did not discriminate between upper and lower scores. A possible reason for this is that Burningham is an English illustrator and may be sporadically
used in classrooms and not be as well known as a Lionni or de Paola who are American illustrators/authors.

Items receiving negative scores on the discrimination indices were: 12 (poem by Karla Kuskin: "I Woke up This Morning") D = -26.7; 48 (Winnie-the-Pooh by A.A. Milne) D = -6.7; and 60 (OX-CART MAN by Donald Hall) D = -15.0. Possible reasons for such erratic answer patterns might be that students were unfamiliar with the items and guessed or that a well-known book like WINNIE-THE-POOH was familiar to children because it has had exposure on TV, as well as on commercial items. Item difficulty distribution and item discrimination distribution are included below in Table One.

TABLE ONE. ITEM DIFFICULTY DISTRIBUTION AND ITEM DISCRIMINATION FOR REVISED HUCK LITERATURE INVENTORY.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ITEM ANALYSIS</th>
<th>ITEM DIFFICULTY DISTRIBUTION</th>
<th>ITEM DISCRIMINATION DISTRIBUTION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ITEM DIFFICULTY RANGE</td>
<td>NUMBER OF ITEMS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>.81 - 1.00</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>.61 - .80</td>
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<td></td>
<td>.00 - .20</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>BELOW .00</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>MEAN ITEM DIFFICULTY = .372</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>MEAN ITEM DISCRIMINATION = .273</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As a result of the pilot test and statistical analysis the inventory was not changed for the study.

PROCEDURAL FINDINGS. Groups of three students listened to three books in a conference room sitting at a round table on comfortable chairs down the hall from their classroom. They were then interviewed
Individually in a different part of the room while the others worked silently on drawing a picture that showed the theme of the two books chosen and included a thematic caption. The idea of theme was explained briefly at this point since all of the children received instructions as to the drawing and the accompanying caption. Children were told to choose the two stories that had the same ideas, that told about the same kind of idea. On the basis of the pilot test it was determined that any child who did not understand the concept of theme would receive a brief explanation during the interview. One or two sentences were generally sufficient to explain the concept. As a result none of the children had difficulty with the task during the interview.

Using the interview schedule described under instrumentation, the children were encouraged to talk about the themes of the matching books. Based on these early interviews, it was determined that the conversations would flow naturally. Questions from the interview were asked, however, if children wanted to talk off the subject they were not discouraged. Follow-up questions brought them back to the topic and occasionally the children would indicate that they had nothing more to say, or that a particular question was redundant, or that they had no interest or opinion in a particular question. As described earlier, the nature of the interview was that of eliciting the same type of information from a variety of perceptual bases, so this was not viewed as problematic.

Interview times ranged from ten to twenty-five minutes. Some students simply had more to say than other students. Length of interview did not necessarily indicate quality of response. Some
students retold entire stories in response to certain questions, whereas others were succinct in their answers, or they had very little to say in response to the books. Children were given adequate time to respond to questions and did so in varying time frames.

The pilot test indicated that three books could be read with the children given the time constraints; however, a lengthy version of SNOW WHITE by Trina Hyman was replaced with a shorter version by Susan Jeffers because the version by Hyman took 20 minutes to read and the attention span of the second graders could not accommodate this and two additional books.

SUBJECT SELECTION

Sixty subjects representing three age levels (kindergarten, second and fourth grades) were chosen from 20 classroom populations of children in the same school based on test scores administered by the researcher and trained assistants. Twenty children were chosen from each of the three grades. The parameter population was given a literature inventory (Revised Huck Literature Inventory, 1984) which identified children having a high and low exposure to children's literature. The high scoring group was comprised of thirty subjects, ten in each grade. The lower scoring group was comprised of thirty subjects, ten in each grade. These children live in a middle class suburb of a large metropolitan midwestern city. The school itself is located in a noncommercial section of the city surrounded by well kept moderately sized homes. There are libraries in the area with good selections of books, as well as several bookstores which cater to children's literature.
The school also has many books available in classrooms as well as in the school library.

Several tasks were responded to over a period of eight weeks during the first half of the school year. The three age levels chosen represented distinct developmental levels of children in terms of response to thematic elements in narrative, as has been pointed out in the review of research. The youngest population of children, the kindergarten child, was chosen for several reasons.

First, long held notions of researchers regarding the theme generating abilities of the preschool and kindergarten child have asserted that this age child is developmentally incapable of generating theme. Piaget (1926; 1928) designated 7-8 years of age as the critical point at which the child begins to abstract relevant thematic information. Applebee (1978) in his analysis of children's stories points out that children below the age of six generally lack clear thematic centers in their production of stories. Furthermore, no research had been conducted with this age group which used children's literature to explore the child's thematic encoding of meaning. Paley's (1981) observations of kindergarten children would indicate that this age group is aware of thematic content and that young children do encode meaning from stories based upon their own perceptions of the world. Consequently, this age group was included in the population sample to test this concept of thematic awareness and production.

The second grade child was chosen to show the range of responses possible for the child in the concrete stage of operations. This age child has just learned to read independently and is expanding his or her
repertoire of knowledge without total reliance on listening to stories read aloud.

The fourth grade level was the upper level of the population sample and provided a view of the child who is beginning to expand his or her awareness of expository structure. Baumann (1981) asserts that the fourth grade child is beginning to use textbooks widely in the classroom setting. Since expository writing is structured differently than narrative forms the child must become familiar with a new style of writing. Expository passages place major ideas in initial sentence positions with supporting statements following. There are headings and subheadings, almost an outline of information. This is not a style of writing with which younger children are typically familiar. His research indicates that children tested were not proficient at generating or identifying theme in content area reading; therefore, this age group provides a narrative perspective of the child who is beginning to take on expository structures.

SETTING OF THE SCHOOL

The school chosen for the study had two separate programs of instruction available for children. The first was a more traditionally based classroom, termed contemporary, which used basal readers, workbooks and textbooks. Children in several of these classrooms were also observed listening to books being read aloud by teachers. The second program was a literature based reading program which was informal in nature and based on the British system of primary education. An
expansion on the nature of the two classroom populations will be included in the following two chapters which will explore any differences that may appear based on the results. It is important to note that parents of children in the literature based classrooms have opted for this special program and that their children are not automatically placed in an informal setting.

MATERIALS

Books for this study were chosen from the wide variety of children's books available. It was felt that to maintain ecological validity using books familiar to the child (in natural book sharing situations), as opposed to using constructed materials, was desirable. Thus no effort was made to control for vocabulary. Unnatural situations making use of type written sheets for story sharing were not included in the design. Books chosen reflected a concern for quality of text and illustrations as outlined in Huck's CHILDREN'S LITERATURE IN THE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL (1979). The child's age was also of concern and every effort was made to choose books which would be considered appropriate to the child's cognitive development. A committee of professors in the area of reading and children's literature assisted with the final selection of books.

For example, a picture book such as THE SEEING STICK by Jane Yolen would not be a good choice for the kindergarten child due to the abstract theme of seeing the world without eyes; however, the same book would be an excellent choice for the fourth grade child due to the maturity of the theme. The older child would be stretched with the thematic content, whereas the young child would be confused. Content must
necessarily be of concern to the educator in choosing appropriate books for appropriate ages, and as has been pointed out in chapter two in the review of the research, content has not been a major concern of recent research. Passages have been maintained at low levels of vocabulary and have been essentially as unlike real books as possible. This study emphasized content and appropriately graded books because of the nature of the thematic exploration involved in the tasks. If the child's perceptions were to be explored in depth, then it was necessary that the materials reflected themes about which young children could verbalize, and themes which challenged rather than inhibited the older student. Titles with everyday themes were covered so that thematic statements were not influenced by clues contained in the titles. The folklore selections were seen as more confusing and thus the titles were not covered. Table two shows the books used for the study by grade and genre.
### TABLE 2. BOOKS, GRADE LEVELS AND GENRES USED FOR TASK ONE.

**TABLE TWO**

**BOOKS READ ALOUD**

Realistic fiction

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>KINDERGARTEN:</th>
<th>TITCH by Pat Hutchins</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>THE CARROT SEED by Ruth Krauss</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>NEW BLUE SHOES by Eve Rice</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SECOND GRADE:</th>
<th>THE HATING BOOK by Charlotte Zolotow</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>LET'S BE ENEMIES by Janice Udry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SAY IT by Charlotte Zolotow</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FOURTH GRADE:</th>
<th>STEVIE by John Steptoe</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>THY FRIEND, OBADIAH by Brinton Turkle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>WHEN I WAS YOUNG IN THE MOUNTAINS by Cynthia Rylant</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## TABLE 2 (continued),

**Folktales**

**KINDERGARTEN:**
- THE GINGERBREAD BOY by Paul Galdone
- THE THREE LITTLE PIGS by Paul Galdone
- THE THREE BILLY GOATS GRUFF by Marcia Brown

**SECOND GRADE:**
- TATTERCOATS by Flora Steel
- SNOWWHITE by Trina Hyman
- THE SWINEHERD by Lisbeth Zwerger

**FOURTH GRADE:**
- DAWN by Molly Bang
- A JAPANESE FAIRY TALE by Jane Ike
- THE STONECUTTER by Gerald McDermott

Interview questions based on an interview of guide questions to aid in story retelling by Goodman and Burke (Revised Lehr, 1984), were used during task two. The questions were only a guide and were modified to
individual needs when necessary. If a child did not understand a concept it was explained in one or two additional sentences which used different words to get at the concept.

1) Match two titles. Why did you choose these two books? What are they both about?
2) Can you tell me what the whole story was about in a few words or in short form?
3) Are these stories similar to any other stories you have read? How?
4) What were the authors trying to teach you when he or she wrote these stories?
5) What are the most important ideas in these stories?
6) Pick a story. Why did it end like it did?
7) Is there anything you would have changed?
8) Did you like the story? Why or why not?
9) Would you have changed the ending?

University students enrolled in an undergraduate Childrens' Literature course rated the books for thematic importance. The students listened to the series of three books and were asked to write the numbers of the two books which shared a common theme. They were then asked to write a thematic statement linking the two books with similar themes. Based on the answers of the students it was determined that the 2 books chosen in each category had easily identifiable themes, with a third book in each group easily identified as being thematically
different. Consensus was higher for the realistic books. The folktales had more diversity in the answers, which was consistent with the answers of the children tested. Table three shows the responses of the university students for thematically matched books.

TABLE 3. ADULT CHOICES FOR THEMATICALLY MATCHED BOOKS.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Titles</th>
<th>Number Responding</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>REALISTIC FICTION</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TITCH/CARROT SEED</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LET'S BE ENEMIES/HATING BOOK</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STEVIE/THYFRIEND, OBADIAH</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>FOLKTALES</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>THREE PIGS/THREE BILLY GOATS</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TATTERCOATS/SNOW WHITE</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DAWN/JAPANESE FAIRY TALE</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

CLASSROOMS USED IN THE STUDY

All of the children receiving parental permission to participate in the study were given the RHLI (n=120). There were 27 fourth graders from 8 classrooms (from a total population of 88 fourth grade children in the school), 41 second graders from 6 classrooms (from a total
population of 81 second grade children (in the school) and 52 kindergarteners from 7 classrooms (from a total population 118 kindergarten in the school). The ten highest scores and ten lowest scores were chosen from each grade. The result was that 6 fourth grade, 6 second grade and 6 kindergarten classrooms were used for the study. The classroom choices relate to RHLI scores only and were not manipulated.

PROCEDURES

The data was gathered over a period of eight weeks in the first half of the school year. (November-January) Due to scheduling in the schools and the length of the reading tasks a flexible schedule was developed for data collection. Mornings were designated as primary data collection times. It was also thought that the children would be more alert in morning sessions.

The experiment was completed in small groups. The children listened to the books read by the researcher in groups of 2-5. After the reading the children were given 10-15 minutes to draw pictures about the themes of the books and then interviewed individually and asked to choose the two stories which were thematically similar. The books were in visual range and easy reach of the child and the child was able to handle the books if he or she chose to do so. They were then asked to explain how or why the two books chosen were similar. The children were individually interviewed using the modified Burke and Goodman Interview and all answers were taped. A scoring sheet was also used to record notes during the interview sessions. While one child was
interviewed the others were allowed to continue working with art papers and materials. The researcher was within visual sight of the children and was able to observe that the children did not interact. Any child who was unwilling or not ready to be interviewed was given time to think about the books. The perception of the researcher during the field test of procedures was that the students who had formulated thematic ideas were eager to share them and made themselves available for the interview. When asked, those needing more time, indicated a preference for drawing first and talking later. This contributed to the natural setting of the study, imitating the classroom atmosphere of sharing when ready. It was particularly helpful in adding to the comfort level of the kindergarten children.

ANALYSIS OF DATA

Students were rated as to their ability to choose two books with similar themes. In task two thematic statements were rated using a hierarchy for scoring which incorporates a blending of general and specific information in theme statements. Based on Otto's scale (Adapted, Lehr 1984) and Applebee's levels of abstraction in recalling stories, answers were grouped according to the children's ability to generate thematic statements which were congruent with those globally identified by fluent readers, those which were text-congruent but divergent, and those which were not congruent with the text. Table 4 was used to determine the thematic levels achieved in answers.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scale Value</th>
<th>Category Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>A statement which generalizes the content of the stories without including specific plot information from the stories.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Both general and specific elements correctly stated.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>One element correctly stated, the other too generally or too specifically stated.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>One element correctly stated.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Irrelevant or incorrect material plus one element correctly stated or one element correctly stated and the other too general or specific or both elements correctly stated.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>One or both elements generally stated.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>One or both elements too generally or specifically stated plus irrelevant or incorrect material or one or both elements too specifically stated or only irrelevant or incorrect material.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>No thematic response given.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Otto scale, Adapted Lehr, 1984)
Thematic Scale scores were analyzed using the Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient to determine whether a relation existed between score on the Thematic Scale and the RHLI.

The independent variables, which were score on the RHLI and grade of subjects, were tested for levels of significance in a 3 X 2 analysis of variance. Subsequent analyses were employed when significant differences were perceived among the variables. These results are reported in Chapter Four in the report of the findings.

**SUMMARY**

A qualitative approach employing certain quantitative methods was used to explore children's thematic responses to books shared in a natural, informal context. The study took eight weeks during the first half of the 1984-85 school year. The researcher's role was that of observer-participant, recording events through tape recorded and written notes during a series of events conducted on school premises with small groups of children. This data was analyzed using a scale designed to rate thematic statements. The data was further analyzed using descriptive techniques to determine how children build thematic meaning during book experiences.
CHAPTER IV
PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF DATA

INTRODUCTION

The major purposes of this study were to: 1) describe the child's ability to identify and generate theme using children's literature; 2) determine what effect using two different genres of children's literature would have on the child's ability to identify or generate theme; 3) describe the development of that ability with kindergarten, second and fourth grade children; and lastly, 4) determine whether an exposure to children's literature would affect the child's ability to identify or generate theme.

The report of the findings will be divided into three sections. Since exposure to children's literature was a critical independent variable of the study the first section will report the range of scores made on the Revised Huck Literature Inventory. The second section will analyze children's scores for identification of theme. In this task the children were asked to link two books with similar themes, an identification task only which did not entail justification of choices made. The third section will examine children's thematic statements for choices made through the use of a thematic scale. In this task the children were asked to generate thematic statements through an oral interview. This task did entail the justification of choices made. This section will be subdivided
into two parts. Part one will present the statistical analysis between scores on the Thematic Scale and the Revised Huck Literature Inventory by grade level. Part two will discuss the three categories derived from the verbal data and reveal the patterns found within the genres according to these categories.

I. LITERATURE INVENTORY SCORES

All children participating in the study were given the Revised Huck Literature Inventory. Due to the length of the test the kindergarten children were tested individually with a random sampling of items equal to half of the test, that is 31 items. New items were randomized separately from old test items to insure an equal distribution of all items. Twenty children were chosen from each grade level. The top ten scores on the RHLI and the bottom ten scores on the RHLI were chosen as the sample from each grade.

Results showed a range of 7-24 items correct for the 52 kindergarten children. The low group scores ranged from 7-12 correct; the high group scores ranged from 19-24 correct. The mean for the test was 15.5. with a standard deviation of 4.25.

Second grade scores on the 63 item test ranged from 14-56 items correct. The low group scores ranged from 14-40; the high group scores ranged from 50-56. This wide range occurred because of a single low score of 14, 15 points below the next nearest low score, whereas the others clustered between 29-40. The mean of the test was 43 with a standard deviation of 7.7.
Fourth grade scores on the 63 item test ranged from 35-60. The low group scores ranged from 35-43; the high group scores ranged from 47-60. The mean of the test was 46 with a standard deviation of 5.6.

The high and low groups, different by design, were also determined to be significantly different groups of children through the use of a t-test, significant above the .001 level. Table 5 shows the range of scores, means and standard deviations of the subjects within grade and grouping by score on the RHLI.

**TABLE 5. RANGE, MEANS AND STANDARD DEVIATIONS OF SCORES BY GRADE AND GROUP SCORE ON THE REVISED HUCK LITERATURE INVENTORY IN SCHOOL FROM WHICH SUBJECTS WERE CHOSEN.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GRADE/GROUP</th>
<th>RANGE OF SCORES</th>
<th>MEANS</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>HIGH</td>
<td>19-24</td>
<td>21.3</td>
<td>1.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KND. LOW</td>
<td>7-12</td>
<td>9.5</td>
<td>1.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>7-24</td>
<td>15.5</td>
<td>4.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HIGH</td>
<td>50-56</td>
<td>51.9</td>
<td>1.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TWO LOW</td>
<td>14-40</td>
<td>33.5</td>
<td>7.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>14-56</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>7.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HIGH</td>
<td>47-60</td>
<td>52.1</td>
<td>3.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FOUR LOW</td>
<td>35-43</td>
<td>40.6</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>35-60</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>5.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The range and means of scores showed a developmental increase in ability by age which one would expect. This independent variable will be discussed as it relates to other variables throughout the remainder of the chapter.

II. CHILDREN'S ABILITY TO IDENTIFY THEME

Identification of theme did not involve a verbal statement of theme. Children listened to three books and were asked to identify the two books which they felt were linked thematically. (see chapter three for complete listing of book titles used) Many children pointed to the two books they had chosen or they stated the designated number for the books chosen. The choices of the children were compared to the matched titles previously paired by students in an undergraduate children's literature program. Table 6 shows the theme related book choices children made which agreed with adult choices.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE 6. CHILDREN'S RESPONSES WHICH AGREE WITH ADULT CHOICES.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>REALISTIC FICTION</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kindergarten 80% (N=16)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade two 100% (N=20)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade four 100% (N=20)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Children at all grade levels were better able to identify books with similar realistic themes than they were able to identify folktales with
similar themes. Older children scored higher than kindergarten children in the identification task; however, no difference existed between the scores of the second and fourth grade children. Later tasks revealed information which might explain this phenomena. Table 7 gives a break down of the book titles children chose as being thematically linked and differentiates between high and low group scores by grade on the RHLI.
TABLE 7. THEMATICALLY LINKED BOOK TITLES CHOSEN BY KINDERGARTEN, SECOND AND FOURTH GRADE CHILDREN.

[High/Low category represents score on RHLI]

**KINDERGARTEN**

Realistic Fiction [n=20]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>* TITCH/CARROT SEED</th>
<th>TITCH/NEW BLUE SHOES</th>
<th>CARROT SEED/NEW BLUE SHOES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Folktales [n=20]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>* 3 PIGS/3 BILLY GOATS</th>
<th>3 PIGS/GINGERBREAD BOY</th>
<th>3 BILLY GOATS/GINGERBREAD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Grade Two**

Realistic Fiction [n=20]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>* HATING BOOK/LET'S BE ENEMIES</th>
<th>HATING BOOK/SAY IT</th>
<th>LET'S BE ENEMIES/SAY IT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
TABLE 7 (continued),

Folktales  [n=20]

* TATTERCOATS/SNOWWHITE  TATTERCOATS/SWINEHERD  SNOWWHITE/SWINEHERD
High  8   2   0
Low   4   6   0
Total 12  8   0

Grade Four

Realistic Fiction  [n=20]

* THY FRIEND, OBADIAH/STEVIE  STEVIE/WHEN I WAS YOUNG  OBADIAH/WHEN I WAS YOUNG
High  10  0   0
Low   10  0   0
Total 20  0   0

Folktales  [n=20]

*DAWN/JAPANESE FAIRYTALE  *STONECUTTER/DAWN  STONECUTTER/JAPANESE
High  6   2   2
Low   6   2   2
Total 12  4   4

*BOOKS PAIRED BY ADULTS ON BASIS OF THEME

In realistic fiction there was no relation between high and low scores on the RHLI and the ability of children in kindergarten, second and fourth grades to identify books with similar themes. The subjects concurred with the adults on the two books with similar themes. In folktales books kindergarten and second grade children scoring high on the RHLI identified thematically linked books more often than those scoring
low on the RHLI. A 2 X 2 analysis of variance showed that there was no significant difference at the kindergarten level between the high and low RHLI groups in terms of ability to identify thematically matched folktale books. However, at the second grade level the difference was significant beyond the .05 level with a probability level of .023 using a Fisher Exact Test (two-tail). This finding is especially interesting since with the second grade sample, exposure to literature was a strong determinant as to whether a child would be able to identify thematically matched folktale books. An analysis of the transcribed interviews suggested why this phenomena did not occur with the kindergarten sample and will be discussed in part two of the third section in greater detail.

Discussion of Results for Identification of Theme

Children were better able to identify books having linked themes in realistic fiction than in folktales. This ability increased after kindergarten, but there were no differences between second and fourth grade students. One possible explanation is that second and fourth grade children are in a similar cognitive stage of development and are able to function similarly in identification tasks with appropriately graded materials. One could not conclude, based on the present study, that second grade children would be able to link books read to the fourth grade children in this study.

Secondly, the thematic identification choices of the children largely agreed with the adult choices. This did not automatically preclude the possibility that choices were made with different justification than that
used by adults. Nor did it preclude the possibility that children selecting
other books as having linking themes did not have logical rationales for
their choices based on information in the book. This will be explored in
detail in the next section of the chapter, part three, where children’s
responses were analyzed.

III. CHILDREN’S ABILITY TO GENERATE THEME

Children were interviewed to determine whether thematic
statements could be generated which would reflect the overarching
concept of meaning for books heard. Of the 120 interview responses only
one child was unable to give a thematic response and consequently
received a score of zero for both interview sessions. All other
participants were able, at least to a minimal degree, to generate or
attempt to generate a thematic response for one or more of the books
heard.

Using the Thematic Scale

All transcripts of the interview were examined for thematic
content. Some of the thematic statements were embedded within
retellings or summaries of the stories. Some of the statements were
combined with statements made in other portions of the interview to
link ideas held by students, which had a tendency to build meaning as the
Interview progressed. For example, a child was asked what the authors
of DAWN or THE STONECUTTER were trying to teach. The answer was:
"The two that are similar I think, the more you're greedy the more you
can lose in trying to get what you want." A follow up question asked about the endings. The answer extended the previous statement. "He (Stonecutter) wanted to be greater and greater than anything else and he wanted to be a mountain and he started to get chipped away like he was less and less of himself." The latter statement builds upon what preceded and became an elaboration of the child's theme statement, indicating a facility with pulling out an overarching concept for THE STONECUTTER. In all cases the child's own language, within the context of the social situation, was the focus of the analysis. For example, when the child above referred to the character in the book as "he," the meaning was not ambiguously applied, rather the pronoun was shown as referring directly to the appropriate character by pointing to the book; however, if a child were vague without contextual application, the child was not given a higher ranking on the Thematic Scale.

Relationship of Theme to Previous Exposure to Literature

The statements were all given a score on the Thematic Scale. Figures 1-6 show thematic scores for realistic fiction and folktales at each grade level. The thematic scores were correlated to the scores of the RHLI to determine whether a relation existed between exposure to children's literature and ability to generate theme. An independent rater, a doctoral candidate in the area of reading and children's literature, was given 10% of the thematic statements and established an interrater agreement of 92.5% with the researcher. Figure 1 contains the range of thematic scores for kindergarten children for realistic fiction and
As can be seen from Figure 1 low group scores are clustered in quadrant two, which corresponds below the level of ability to state theme, whereas quadrant one, corresponding above level four on the Thematic Scale, shows only two thematic scores for the low group. Quadrant three shows several scores for the high group, which are below the level of theme, but the majority of the scores for the high group are
clustered in quadrant four, at the highest levels on the Thematic Scale.
In quadrant four scores are scattered between four and seven on the
Thematic Scale, indicating that the high group was concentrated at the
themetic levels of the scale.

On the scale, a score of 2 indicated only a vague ability to talk about
theme. At this ranking on the scale, the child was not able to articulate
theme clearly, but was able to minimally explore ideas in the story
without establishing an overarching concept. For example, knowing that
two of the little pigs and the gingerbread boy got eaten up was beginning
to get at the theme of the folktales, but was nonetheless too vague to be
considered a theme statement. At this level, the child was beginning to
formulate ideas in relation to theme, but was not able to generate a
clear statement, whereas a score of 4 indicated a concrete ability to
state the theme of a story. In this stage the child often included
elements from the story to buttress a position, but was not able to leave
the literal elements of the story behind. "This one built his house with
bricks...cause he didn't want the wolf to get him." This response was
literally correct and captured the core of the story.

Among the 20 low scores on the RHLI for both genres only two
children achieved a score of four on the folktale selections, none on the
realistic fiction. In contrast, of the 20 high scores none registered a one
and only four received a 2 or a 3 on the Thematic Scale for realistic
fiction and folktales. The remaining scores were four and above. This
means that 18 children in the low group were unable to state theme, even
at a concrete level, whereas 16 children in the high group were able to
state theme. In this group three children were able to generate theme.
statements which were given a score of 7 and three were given a score of 6. This indicated a strong relationship between literature exposure and ability to generate theme. 80% of the high exposure group were able to state theme, whereas only 10% of the children with a low exposure to literature were able to do the same. An analysis of variance revealed a significant difference above or beyond the .05 level between the high and low groups and score on the Thematic Scale.

Within the narrow range of high or low scores position did not seem to affect the individual’s ability to determine theme. For example, the child receiving a score of 19 on the RHLI did as well with theme as the child receiving a score of 24. Figure 2 shows the averages for kindergarten scores for both genres.
There was a broad jump on the inventory between a 12 (the highest of the low scores) and a score of 19 (the lowest of the high scores), which corresponded to the thematic scale from 2.5 to 4. The scores show a positive correlation of .76 for realistic fiction and .69 for folktales between exposure to children's literature and score on the Thematic Scale beyond the .05 level of significance. Average scores on the Thematic Scale were 3.1 for realistic fiction with a standard
deviation of 1.77 and an average 3.55 for folktales with a standard deviation of 1.9. Table 10 contains the range of thematic scores for second grade children for realistic fiction and folklore in relation to the score on the RHLI.

FIGURE 3. RANGE OF THEMATIC SCALE SCORES IN RELATION TO SCORE ON RHLI FOR SECOND GRADE CHILDREN.

As can be seen from Figure 3 the first quadrant has a cluster of scores at the point that corresponds to level four on the Thematic Scale. Only one score reaches a seven in quadrant one. The remaining scores for
the low group are found in quadrant two, below the level of ability to state theme. Quadrant three has a small group of scores for folktales only, which are below the level of theme. The remainder of scores for the high group are above the level of four on the Thematic Scale, which corresponds to being able to state theme at the concrete level of ability or above. On the scale a score of 3 indicated a basic inability to generate a thematic statement without including misinformation from or about the text. The children in the low group were better able, however, to talk about theme than the kindergarten children in the low group, but were still below the concrete level of generating theme. For example, Kate stated that the most important idea in TATTERCOATS was to "like people whether when they were born they killed someone or just when someone died that they really loved." She understood the basic idea of the story, but had somehow garbled the events of the story and was unable to generate a coherent statement.

On the low scores the scale was fairly consistent until the child achieving a 40 on the RHLI was considered. He generated a theme statement scored as a 7. In contrast to this three of the children with high RHLI scores generated statements with a value of 1-2. Their corresponding scores on realistic fiction was rather high, however they were unable to score well on the folktale selections. Both of the boys in the high group receiving a score of one indicated that they did not like fairy tales, and that they preferred to listen to chapter books. Both seemed reluctant to discuss the folktales. It would be difficult to say that both boys were able or unable to generate a theme statement for the folktale selections, but attitude toward books clearly affected their
willingness to talk about the books.

A difference emerged at the second grade level for generation of theme. The low group was able to state theme 35% of the time. The high group was able to state theme 65% of the time. Developmentally, the low group was better able to generate theme than the low kindergarten group, which achieved a thematic level only 10% of the time. There were no differences between the high groups for both grades. This indicated that ability to generate theme improved as a function of age, at least for the groups with a low exposure to children’s literature, and as a function of literature exposure within grades. Figure 4 shows the averages for second grade scores for both genres.
There was a jump on the inventory between a 40 (the highest of the low scores) and a score of 50 (the lowest of the high scores), which corresponded to the Thematic Scale from 3 to 4.5. Analysis of variance revealed a significant difference above the .05 level between the high and low groups and score on the Thematic Scale. The scores show a positive correlation of .82 for realistic fiction and .5 for folktales between exposure to children's literature and score on the Thematic
Scale beyond the .05 level of significance. Average scores on the Thematic Scale were 4.3 for realistic fiction with a standard of 1.9 and an average of 3.1 for folktales with a standard deviation of 2.2. The combined theme scores for second grade indicated a higher range of ability for generation of theme when compared to the combined kindergarten scores. Figure 5 contains the range of thematic scores for fourth grade children for realistic fiction and folktales in relation to the score on the RHLI.

FIGURE 5. RANGE OF THEMATIC SCALE SCORES IN RELATION TO SCORE ON RHLI FOR FOURTH GRADE CHILDREN.
A positive relation existed between scores on the Thematic Scale and scores on the RHLI for fourth grade children tested and interviewed for this study; however, some disparity occurred in scores. Quadrant one shows many scores for realistic fiction, which indicates that children in the low group were able to state theme. Quadrant two shows a large clustering of scores, particularly for folklore, indicating that this genre was more difficult for students in the low group, in terms of successful generation of theme. Quadrant three has very few scores appearing for the high group, however, the fourth quadrant shows where most of the high group scores appear.

Three boys from a literature-based classroom, not scoring high on the RHLI, were able to generate theme statements which were ranked quite high on the Thematic Scale. They were perhaps less familiar with literature for younger children as their RHLI scores indicated, but nonetheless had a daily exposure to a wide variety of books in the classroom, as observed by this researcher through classroom observations and informal interviews with their teacher. This had a negative effect on the correlation but the type of classroom would perhaps explain the disparity. Without the single score of 7 on the folktale task the correlation became $r = .72$, more than a point difference, and indicative of a strong correlation. Figure 6 shows the averages for fourth grade scores for both genres.
The gap between the low and high scores showed an average increase from 3.5 to 4.5 on the Thematic Scale. This meant that the low group was still, on the average, below the concrete level of generating theme, because a 3 on the Thematic Scale is an indication of a statement containing information that does not match the text. Despite the aberrant fourth grade scores the combined scores for realistic fiction and folktales achieved a correlation coefficient of \( r = .69 \) and suggested a strong relation between thematic generation and exposure to literature. Analysis of variance revealed a significant difference above the .05 level between the high and low groups and score on the Thematic Scale. It was
Interesting to note that the child receiving the highest score (60) on the RHLI also measured a score of 7 on the Thematic Scale in both categories. The scores show a positive correlation of .5 for realistic fiction and a .61 for folktales between exposure to children's literature and score on the Thematic Scale beyond the .05 level of significance. Average scores on the Thematic Scale were 4.8 for realistic fiction with a standard of 1.54 and an average of 3.9 for folktales with a standard deviation of 2.3.

Development of Ability to State Theme Across Three Grade Levels

In all three grades there was an upward parallel growth pattern in ability to generate theme, in relation to score on the RHLI. The mean difference between each level was approximately 3.3 for kindergarten, 3.7 for second grade, 4.3 for fourth grade for both high and low groups of children. Within grades the mean difference between the high and low literature exposure groups was wider, varying from 1.95 to 4.7 for kindergarten, 2.5 to 4.95 for second grade and 3.25 to 5.4 for fourth grade on the Thematic Scale.

An important finding of the study was that kindergarten children with high RHLI scores averaged 4.5 in realistic fiction on the Thematic Scale, which was higher than the second grade group of children scoring low on the RHLI, 2.8 on the Thematic Scale and equal to the low fourth grade group which averaged 4.5 on the Thematic Scale. One would expect kindergarten children to operate at concrete levels of stating theme for this matches the cognitive level of that age child. However, this was only the case for children with a previous exposure to literature.
Furthermore, fourth grade children showed no advantage over the five year old population with a high exposure to books, when graded materials were used. At the second grade level the difference in ability was even greater. The second grade children with low literature exposure did not come close to the high kindergarten group in terms of thematic generating ability.

With folktales the findings were even more pronounced. The high kindergarten group averaged 4.7 on the Thematic Scale contrasted to the low second grade group which averaged 2.1, and the low fourth grade group which averaged 2.4. This suggests that for this group of children, kindergarteners with a high exposure to children's literature were better able to generate concrete theme statements for stories heard and rated at their level of ability than were older children with a low exposure to literature.

Categories for Children's Thematic Statements

The categories used for this section emerged from an analysis of the data in which the child's thematic statements fell into three categories: 1) adult-congruent; 2) text-congruent; 3) not text-congruent. The data came from transcripts of tape recorded interviews during which children discussed themes for books heard by them on two separate occasions. Since realistic fiction and folktales are two separate genres in literature the discussion was divided into two sections under each category, so that the child's concept of finding meaning and expressing theme could be explored in the areas of realism and folktales. From the identification task it was apparent that children
were better able to identify realistic fiction as opposed to folktales. Children are closer to realistic fiction through life experience and are perhaps more facile with that genre of literature. Folktales carry universal themes which are perhaps more difficult for the child to conceptualize. As a result, the two genres generated different types of answers and were separated for the ensuing discussion.

The first category, adult-congruent, is one in which the child's answer matched the adult subject's statements of theme. The second category, text-congruent, differs from the first in that children's answers were plausible based on the book itself, but there was no thematic match between the adult and child answers. The final category, not text-congruent, is one in which children generated theme statements which did not match information given in the book itself.

Answers were further categorized by age and Thematic Scale score. The following discussion will explore each category of response, by genre. The development of the child's ability to generate theme from the concrete to the abstract will also be discussed.

Table 8 shows the range of thematic responses for all books used in the study. Many responses were applicable to two books and some children offered more than one thematic response during the interview. Some of the lower ranking statements on the Thematic Scale were too vague or too general to be included in the following Table 8. For example, "cause both of them have blue" received a ranking of one on the Thematic Scale because it was an attempt on the part of a five year old child to link two books thematically. It is not a theme statement however, and does not fit any of the categories. Other statements made
by children initially matched adult statements, but then with elaborations differed by degree and intent as well as perspective.
TABLE 8. RANGE OF THEMATIC RESPONSES TAKEN FROM INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTS FOR REALISTIC FICTION AND FOLKTALES FOR KINDERGARTEN, SECOND AND FOURTH GRADE CHILDREN.

KINDERGARTEN

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GENRE/TITLE</th>
<th>THEMATIC CATEGORY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>REALISTIC FICTION</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TITCH</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CARROT SEED</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NEW BLUE SHOES</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

FOLKTALES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>THREE BILLY GOATS</th>
<th>THREES LITTLE PIGS</th>
<th>GINGERBREAD BOY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
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</table>

SECOND GRADE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>REALISTIC FICTION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LET'S BE FRIENDS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>THE HATING BOOK</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SAY IT</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

FOLKTALES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>SWINEHERD</th>
<th>SNOW WHITE</th>
<th>TATTERCOATS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
TABLE 8 (continued),

FOURTH GRADE

REALISTIC FICTION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>STEVIE</th>
<th>OBADIAH</th>
<th>WHEN I WAS YOUNG IN THE MT.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

FOLKTALES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>STONECUTTER</th>
<th>DAWN</th>
<th>JAPANESE FAIRY TALE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Kindergarten children responded most frequently to TITCH and THE THREE LITTLE PIGS for realistic fiction and folktales. THE THREE LITTLE PIGS produced the most responses because children linked this title with THE THREE BILLY GOATS GRUFF as well as with THE GINGERBREAD BOY. The responses were largely text congruent, but did not match adult responses. Kindergarten children were preoccupied with being eaten up, not surviving, crossing bridges safely or not at all, not running away from home and building strong brick houses to keep wolves at bay. Adult answers linked THE THREE BILLY GOATS GRUFF and THE THREE LITTLE PIGS as clever characters successfully outsmarting bad characters. Young children were less concerned with being clever and independent. Their concerns were closer to home and suggested a world view closely tied to safety. Danger was to be avoided.

With TITCH the responses were similar. Young children saw Titch as being treated unfairly and winning in the end, or being little and needing big things, or having the most important part when it counted. Adult
responses focused on little people being important or persevering and making it. The children largely ignored NEW BLUE SHOES and concurred with the adults as to which books were thematically matched.

Second grade responses for realistic fiction followed a similar trend by ignoring the third choice, SAY IT, because it did not share a common theme. Children's responses were largely in agreement with adult responses on a basic level. When children elaborated their answers, however, their concerns diverged from those of the adults. The children were concerned with keeping friends even if it meant swallowing pride and taking blame. Children were pragmatic and stated that it was better to find out the trouble, apologize and have someone to play with even if they were occasionally bossy. Adults essentially stated that the overall theme was that of the trials or ups and downs of friendship. With the folktale selections children overwhelmingly chose TATTERCOATS and SNOW WHITE to talk about theme; however, their answers were not well developed and remained at concrete levels and referred to the happy endings of the stories.

Fourth grade children agreed most often with adult responses for folktales. Children agreed with adult responses regarding sacrifice in A JAPANESE FAIRY TALE and DAWN, but they also matched THE STONECUTTER and DAWN on the basis of greed, which was text congruent. However, with realistic fiction, the children matched adult answers initially, but then diverged from adult answers. On the surface the answers were similar, but the elaborations of the children indicated a preoccupation with the nuisance factor involved in the stories which the adults ignored. Children did not respond to WHEN I WAS YOUNG IN THE
MOUNTAINS except to say why it did not match STEVIE and THY FRIEND, OBADIAH.

No single book at any level received more incongruent responses than another. The pattern was steady throughout. Furthermore, no book elicited more responses than other books, except for THE THREE LITTLE PIGS, which was matched in conjunction with both of the other possible titles.

1. ADULT-CONGRUENT RESPONSES

Children Respond to Realistic Fiction

Children's responses ranged from concrete to abstract generalizations. The context shaped the natural flow of the conversation as the interviewer's questions built on the child's own answers, and the children were encouraged to look at the books as she or he reflected on her answers. Of the 60 responses possible across all grade levels 16 occurred at the level of 4 on the Thematic Scale which corresponded to a concrete statement of theme. A concrete statement of theme corresponded to a main idea statement which included literal plot elements. A typical concrete response was given by Mary (5:6) regarding TITCH. "They both (both refers to TITCH and THE CARROT SEED) have a plant that grows...They (brother and sister) get all the biggest things. He (Titch) ends up with the biggest." The story ended like it did because "he (Titch) needed to have something that was bigger. He (Titch) wanted It to grow." This type of statement was actually a summary statement of the story which included the literal main idea components of TITCH.

In this study, kindergarten children were able to summarize stories
when asked to tell what the story was about in a few words or a short form, or when probed about the story from a general perspective. Eight of the twenty kindergarten children interviewed were successfully able to summarize at least one of the stories heard for the realistic fiction selections. All of the eight children were in the high literature exposure group. This ability to summarize the story enabled the child to talk about theme at a concrete level of meaning. The ability to reduce the story to a sentence or two seemed to assist the child with ensuing theme questions that asked for important ideas or evaluative statements. This challenges Applebee's findings that state that the two to six year old child has "little sense of the overall structure of the plot, but rather has a tendency to retell entire stories" and "seems to lack integration into a coherent and well-organized representation of the experience...They can retell stories or incidents, but they have yet to develop a stable system of categorization, and they have no way at all to formulate abstract statements about meaning or purpose." (Applebee, 1978, pp. 123 & 125). In this study 80% of the five year old kindergarten children from the high literature exposure group used summary statements to retell what the story was about. The summary statements varied from one concise sentence to 2–3 sentences in length. Part of the reason for this was that the interviewer asked the child to retell the story in a few words or a short form. [See Appendix E for samples of summary statements by kindergarten children.] Furthermore, 6 children from the high exposure group were able to offer thematic statements that included generalizations about the books, emphasizing the relation between exposure to literature and ability to generate abstract thematic
statements of meaning.

On another level of exploring theme in books was a response by Elizabeth, which typified what 14 kindergarten children knew about internal reaction or motivation of character at the kindergarten level and was concretely linked to the child's ability to state theme. In response to TITCH Beth (5:11) stated: "Like older brothers and sisters had bigger things...All their stuff is bigger. She only got the littlest things." But in the end "she got one of the biggest things...Cause they all got the big stuff and she wanted something big." Beth inferred that it was important for Titch to have something big. This suggests that the young child does reflect on what motivates characters in stories, at a basic level. This link with internal motivation assisted the child in verbalizing theme for stories heard. If the child was able to take on the perspective of the main character, it seemed to enable the child to arrive at theme.

In similar fashion Mary (5:6) stated that Titch was a "little brother. They get all the biggest things. He ends up with the biggest." Titch "needed to have something that was bigger." This went beyond the idea of want because being small and never receiving big things was linked with the need to have something big. Mary went beyond external features and talked about internal needs. Seventy per cent of the kindergarten interviewed for realistic fiction mentioned the internal thought processes which motivated character actions in the stories. This ability assisted the child in stating theme for stories, for the statements including internal motivation or reactions of character were often linked to thematic statements. This finding challenges Mandler and Johnson's findings which suggest that first grade children omit internal reactions
of characters during spontaneous recall. The open ended nature of the interview used for this study, which did not probe directly for internal motivation of character, indicated that kindergarten children were aware of internal reactions of characters in stories and that attention to this story element was interwoven with the child's perception of theme.

At a high level of abstraction Andy (5:0) was able to go beyond the concrete answer and add several general components. The following interview typified the manner in which the child talked about the stories and built on the notion of theme during the interview. (I=Interviewer)

I: Why did you choose those two?

Andy (5:0): First of all it didn't grow and then he got the biggest carrot. And on this one Titch got a bigger got something that his brother and sister didn't get.

I: Can you tell me what one of the stories is about in a few words or a short form?

A: I'll have to read it then.

I: Oh yeah? To remember it you mean.

A: (pause as he looks through TITCH) His brother Pete had a kite that flew high over the trees and his sister had one that flew over the house and Titch just had a little pinwheel.

I: (later) What do you think that the authors were trying to teach you when they wrote those books?

A: That it doesn't matter if you're little or not.

I: How come?

A: Cause if you're little you might get better things. (pause)
I: Did one of those little guys get better things?
A: He got a better thing (points to boy in THE CARROT SEED) and he got a better thing (points to TITCH).
I: Why do you think someone little would get a better thing?
A: Cause big kids have big things and little kids have little things.
I: Why did this book end like it did? (THE CARROT SEED)
A: Because his parents and his brother said it wouldn't grow and it did.

The chain of logic can be connected in the following way:

"It doesn't matter if you're little or not...cause if you're little you might get better things...cause big kids have big things and little kids have little things."

He began with the concrete and through a series of questions was able to generalize the theme of the story. This movement toward building meaning was typical at all age levels, but most apparent with the kindergarten and second grade groups of children. Fourth grade children often responded immediately with thematic statements with fewer theme statements embedded in discussions of the stories.

This thematic information about the book was based on elements in the book and the child's own instantiation of meaning based on background knowledge about how the world operates. The child's own life experience at home and at school formed the basis of the child's meaning structures and was apparent in the child's answer (Duckworth, 1972). This concrete connecting from the book experience to the real life experience buttresses White's (1954) notion of how book experiences
reinforce life experiences as well as how life experience reinforces the book experience. Most of the children interviewed made connections between their concrete experiences and the books heard across age levels. This supports to Hardings (1978) view of narrative as a primary act of mind. To talk about meaning in stories is to "story" itself.

At a more general level of response which did not focus on theme, but did begin to grapple with main ideas of the stories was Kurt's response. It indicated the developmental processes at work in the child's early attempts to generate a thematic statement.

Kurt (6:3): (turns pages of book) They're about (pause) This one's about a plant, I mean this one's about a little girl that has little toys and this one is about a growing carrot.

I: Ok, and how is that the same? How is that the same idea?

K: Cause they both have growing things.

Kurt was not able to concretely state the theme of the story, but he was able to generally identify components that would be included in a thematic statement. His score of 2 gave him credit for what he was able to generate. The scale was designed to give credit for what the child can do, rather than to take away points for what the child cannot do. At the kindergarten level 55% of the responses occurred at this level or lower, which included all of the low scores on the RHLI. Children with a low exposure to literature accounted for all but one of these lower level
responses. Within this framework a developmental perspective began to emerge, in relation to a child's exposure to literature. At the second grade level 20% of the responses were at the level of 2 or below, all of which were in the low group. Only 10% of the fourth grade responses occurred at or below this level, none of which were in the high group. This suggested that as children grew older their facility with stating theme for realistic fiction improved in the low literature exposure group, but was still below the ability of the high group.

The question that seemed most effective in serving as a catalyst to generate thematic statements when the initial question regarding children's choices was not successful asked the children what they thought the authors were trying to teach when they wrote the books. The perspective of the question was outside of the book itself and suggested that the author had a point of view when writing the book. This in itself may have assisted the child in distancing himself or herself from the literal elements of the book and may have been a new line of reasoning for some of the children questioned. The type of questions used in the interview which asked the child about what the author was trying to teach, or what the most important ideas were in the story, guided children to state theme, whereas, "retell" or "recall" questions would not have led the children to explore theme. Children were willing to explore the concepts of the books because the question continued to probe for what they knew about theme. General questions which ask the child to tell all that he or she can remember about the story will not cause the child to be specific about answering, but will act rather as a net which encompasses anything the child wishes to include.
Children at the second and fourth grade levels more typically distanced their thematic statements from the characters in the book by using "you" and "people," rather than referring directly to characters in the stories, showing an ability to abstract which was not typically present in the kindergarten statements. Many of the older children were able to cite personal examples which related to the stated themes of books chosen. One second grade boy gave an elaborate description of a peer structure in his neighborhood which included a role for his little sister. He clearly understood the theme of THE HATING BOOK by Janice Udry and was able to apply it to his own situation. Other children suggested common sense rules or truisms to live by in relation to the "lesson" of a particular book.

Other children developed a rather abstract perspective in their reactions to the books, which showed a maturity and depth in ability to state theme and was rated as a 7 on the Thematic Scale. In response to LET'S BE ENEMEIS by Charlotte Zolotow Benny (7:6) stated: "That you can't always have things your way...Cause you have to let your friends have things their way sometimes." Benny's analogy to real life situations tempers the stance of the book character and suggests a mediating position. This ability to stand outside the story and analyze the action is an abstract cognitive ability. At the kindergarten level only 10% of the responses occurred at this level; 30% at the second grade level; and 40% at the fourth grade level. All but three of the responses occurred in the high literature exposure groups. The three from the low exposure group were fourth grade children in literature based classrooms. A developmental perspective continued to emerge in terms
of the child's increased ability to state theme at abstract levels.

At a highly generalized level of response Nat (10:5) stated the theme for STEVIE by John Steptoe and THY FRIEND, OBADIAH by Brinton Turkle succinctly: "Be nice to your friends while you still have them." His perspective differed from the adult subject's perspective by degree. Adult subjects wrote that one could appreciate someone retrospectively, whereas Nat dealt with the present. The adult responses dealt with a degree of regret. Nat's response, typical of other children, avoided a state of regret by suggesting an alteration of the present. This coincides with the adult's ability to move backward and forward in time at a cognitive level in contrast to the ten year old who is more fixed in the present and prefers to deal concretely with events as they are happening.

Interestingly, Benny's and Nat's responses achieve high levels of generalization, which Applebee asserts does not appear until adolescence. Benny and Nat and other children in the second and fourth grades, still in the concrete stage of operations, were able to make thematic abstractions about books heard using analysis and generalization in their formulations of response, which corresponds to the developmental abilities of the thirteen and seventeen year old children used in Applebee's study (Applebee, 1978, p. 124). The answers of the second and fourth grade children at times achieved a blending of "exemplification" and "generalization" with both realistic fiction and folktales, directly challenging the notion that concrete operational children cannot attend to thematic meaning at abstract levels. Children responding at these abstract thematic levels of meaning were most often in high literature
exposure groups for realistic fiction and folktales.

Averages for thematic response to realistic fiction for kindergarten children were 1.7 for the low group and 4.5 for the high group; for second grade children 2.6 for the low group and 5.8 for the high group; for fourth grade children 4.1 for the low group and 5.5 for the high group. Within grade levels one can see a wide gap between the averages for the high groups and low groups, which supports the correlational data for exposure to literature and score on the Thematic Scale. For the low groups there is a developmental trend from kindergarten to the fourth grade suggesting that the ability to generate theme improves with age regardless of position in high or low group; however, the low second and fourth grade groups are below the high kindergarten group and this ability increases after kindergarten. In the low groups only the fourth grade sample was able to average at the level of concrete theme, whereas the high groups in all three grades were able to minimally able to state theme at concrete levels of awareness.
Children Respond to Folktales

The themes of folktales were more difficult for all three grades to identify and caused lower scale ratings for second and fourth graders. Although many children were able to link books with similar themes they were not necessarily able to justify or explain their choices, which may give credence to Baker and Stein's (1981) position that ability to identify theme may be below the level of ability to verbalize meaning. In the low scoring group for the RHLI few children were able to generate thematic statements for folktales. Of the 30 children in this group, across grade levels, only 6 were able to generate theme statements. Of the 30 children in the high group across grade levels, 24 were able to generate theme. In contrast, for realistic fiction, 11 children in the low group and 28 children in the high group were able to generate theme. This reinforced the idea that life experience enriches one's ability to instantiate meaning. The children in the low exposure group had a more difficult time exploring meaning for stories, whereas children in the high exposure group with a rich literature background were more likely to talk successfully about meaning in stories. Literature deals with life experience, and a child with a high level of exposure increases life experience vicariously through book experiences (White, 1954). Children expressed a strong interest in folktales across grade levels during interviews, challenging Favat's (1977) notion regarding peaked interest in folktales by age 6-8, which declines sharply thereafter. Fourth grade children repeatedly expressed their enjoyment in hearing the tales and some stated that they read folktales/fairytales independently for enjoyment. Part of this may have been due to the introduction of
fairytales from other lands, or tales that were new to the children. This was not however the case with DAWN. Many of the children were familiar with DAWN by Molly Bang and expressed apparent enjoyment as well as anticipation during the oral reading of the story.

Children exhibited a wide range of abilities in the generation of theme with folktales. Becky (7:9) typified the concrete answer for TATTERCOATS illustrated by Diane Goode and SNOW WHITE illustrated by Susan Jeffers. "Because they both have somebody that hated them because and they were both prettiest in the land and they both got married to a prince." She identified the female character in THE SWINEHERD by Lizbeth Zwerger as being different from Snow White and Tattercoats, in that "she wasn't as pretty...she's real mean." As an implicit metaphor the fact that the princess wasn't as pretty could refer to her mannerisms and her personality. There is no other indication in the story or illustrations that would suggest she is less pretty than the other two princesses. Metaphors appeared in many of the older children's answers as a way of linking theme from the concrete to the abstract.

At a high level of abstraction Cary (8:0) stated that in THE SWINEHERD: "The princess learns a lesson...She was someone that wanted just about everything and that's how she learned her lesson...You don't get everything and that's how life goes." His last statement stands alone as the lesson that was taught in Zwerger's tale. The preceding sentences elaborated and illustrated his concise understanding of the story itself, typical of the responses of children scoring a 6 or a 7 on the Thematic Scale regardless of grade.
Dave (8:5) suggested that you should "not be greedy" and that you should not "use other people to get stuff," in reference to THE SWINEHERD, which was an accurate accounting of what the princess was and did. Second and fourth grade children were able to relate the gist of books to life in general. Dave's last statement is a rule of sorts. It is an unspoken "should" or "should not." This suggests the children's preoccupation with an ordered world where rules are made and followed, and supports Favat's (1977) conclusion regarding the predictability of fairy tales and their ability to reaffirm a stable worldview.

Descriptions of story content then included elements of value, which are at core cultural values, imprinted tacitly in the context of the home, in the school and in the neighborhood. The second grade child has already begun to sort the chaos and define categories for behavior and reactions to situations. In contrast, the kindergarten child is more vague, less able to talk about cause and effect, knows that events happen, but is not always able to articulate cause.

Fourth grade children in the high exposure group were more adept at generalizing theme for folktales than were other children. Their answers more typically corresponded to those of the adults at this level; however, there were no average differences between the low groups for the three grades. These children were able to give answers in a more compact form with fewer follow-up questions. In linking DAWN by Molly Bang and A JAPANESE FAIRYTALE by Jane Ike children responded with the following types of answers. "You can sacrifice something for something else," (Chris; 9:2) or "You can sacrifice things to make people happy." (Dave; 10:1)
All of the children interviewed attempted to generate thematic statements for two books, but many of the children decided to talk about individual themes for books heard. This was true across grade level. For the purposes of analyzing theme the study did not penalize respondents for talking about individual books, however, the distinction is an important one in talking about the child’s developing sense of theme. The older children, particularly in the second and fourth grade high groups were better able to handle the complexity of generating a thematic statement linking two books than were the kindergarten children. This ability to state theme for individual books was consequently perceived as an easier task, than was the request to give a statement which abstracted theme for two books, since it involved pulling out overarching concepts for two books and then generating a cohesive statement which became a blend of the two themes. However, the uniqueness of the procedures, which allowed the child a choice between three books that had been read aloud, two of which were strongly linked through theme, may have assisted the child in organizing verbalizations in a way which simple retelling of a story may not have done.

2. TEXT-CONGRUENT RESPONSES

This category of response included many answers which, in other types of main idea studies, are either not accounted for or are not recognized as legitimate because responses differ from those chosen as correct answers by adults. For the purpose of this study the child’s perspective was crucial, because it was hypothesized by the researcher
that children would be able to generate themes that match textual information received in book experiences. This proved to be the case.

Response to Realistic Fiction

At a lower level on the Thematic Scale a child talked about TITCH from the vantage of sharing whatever you’re doing. This child was not able to bring this idea to completion, but she did justify her position within the book with a direct reference to the illustrations which show the children ignoring Titch and in the end show the three working as a team. The information is in the text itself and suggests a unique transaction between the child and the text which is outside the realm of author intentions. This occurred most frequently at the kindergarten level and suggested the child can take on the perspective of another (Donaldson, 1978; Paley, 1983), although it may differ from the view of the adult.

For example, when asked to explain how Titch’s brother and sister were being unfair in response to an earlier statement Luke responded: “Not waiting for him, like here. They’re going real fast up the hill. And here they won’t let him try to fly the kites. Here they couldn’t let him try their instruments. Here Titch he had to hold the nails and they had to the hard jobs. That’s not fair...Right here they won’t let him put any dirt in or hold it. They only let him handed the seed...It grew bigger until it was bigger than them...At the ending the plant grew out and it got those two.” Luke had a colorful interpretation of TITCH which was not incongruent with any information given within the book. Luke viewed being little as a frustrating experience and this was reflected in his
encoding of theme and his notion of retribution. Luke dealt with internal motivation congruently within the book, but in a manner very different than that of the adult. His world view coincided with Tucker's (1972) idea of concrete rewards and punishments as satisfying endings in literature for children aged seven and younger. Luke certainly gave credence to this view of concrete punishment. His ability to perceive the brother and sister as unwilling opponents, as unwilling to let Titch share and have a third position in the hierarchical structure is abstract and shows a facility with the ability to take on another's view.

At the second grade level the idea of theme was viewed more pragmatically and the burden of responsibility to rectify a bad situation was often placed on the protagonist in the story. (THE HATING BOOK and LET'S BE ENEMIES) Sara (7:5) stated "that it has to be some kind of reason that your friend splits up...and just try to still get back together and don't just give up." She viewed not giving up as the key idea in the story. Adult answers characterized the books as the highs and lows of true friendship. There was no real mention of not giving up or looking for the reason when conflict arose. Laura (7:7) added the component of not being understood. "She wanted to find out why her friend was mad at her...She was misunderstood." Brad (7:9) suggested that being friends and not being bossy is what the authors were trying to teach. At the highest level of abstraction was Dan's (8:5) response: "Make friends" and don't "let an argument separate you." He realized that arguments can and do separate people and was able to generalize the story from that perspective. The answers of the second graders were pragmatic and indicated that they were better able to deal with an ordering of the
world than were the younger children. The characters were more in control of their actions and second grade children suggested that they not be mere victims, but take an active role in changing what they didn't like in their worlds. This corresponded to the tone of the fourth grade children as well, although the fourth grade child was more willing to alter themes of stories to fit their notions of how the world should ideally be structured.

In response to questions about changing the endings of stories or any other parts of stories, fourth grade children gave more input and suggested more changes. Kindergarten children made no suggestions for changes except for one boy who did not believe a carrot should be left in the ground so long in THE CARROT SEED. Several fourth grade children were bothered by the fact that Obadiah threw a stone at the seagull and wanted this portion deleted from THY FRIEND, OBADIAH to conform to a theme of kindness, particularly in relation to animals or helpless things. Other children wanted to alter the ending to STEVIE by John Steptoe, so that Robert could be with Stevie again to show that he now liked him.

The idea of a balanced slate or eradication of improper internal motivation seemed important to the older children. Internal motivation of character was most clearly defined with the fourth grade children in that they wanted characters to behave or act as they would act in real life situations. This suggested an ability to tinker with themes at an abstract level and showed that the older child not only understands or can generate theme, but has a desire to alter theme at a cognitive level by way of responding to stories. The question which acted as a catalyst for this type of response asked the child how he or she would change the
story, allowing the child to take on the perspective of the author.

At the same time, the fourth grade children seemed to need more reassurance that their answers were acceptable and that they would not be counted wrong. Several boys checked up on themselves the following day and asked which of them had been right. They were relieved to hear that there was a broad range of acceptance. This preoccupation with right and wrong responses was not apparent with the younger children.

Response to Folktales
Within this range of thematic responses, answers tended to be concrete, almost metaphorical. The child's emphasis, however, was most likely intended as a literal statement of meaning. Pete (5:0) stated that you should "be careful walking on bridges," and that you should "stay away from wolfs." The metaphor has several layers of meaning and at a very literal level is a caution to the billy goats and others in a similar position. As a rule for life the metaphor has application and the additional warning to stay away from wolfs is succinct and true. What Pete and other children may not realize is that wolves are everywhere and that not all are furry and four legged. His concrete language may be used metaphorically and creates a vivid image, although his level of awareness is probably not at the metaphorical level. If asked to explain what bridges were crossed or which wolves were dangerous, Pete would probably have referred directly to the elements in the stories.

The children also related truisms as thematic statements, most of which were probably learned in the home or at school and could be taken at several levels of meaning. The books taught you "not to trust strangers
that you don't know" or more concretely that "wolfs are dangerous and so are foxes—they can eat you." One of the second grade children stated that the books teach you "to don't open doors to strangers." (Don B:2) This paralleled statements made by kindergarten children regarding THE THREE PIGS and showed a literal response to the books based on rules for behavior applicable to every day life. The responses showed the children's attempts to sort out meaning in stories heard and it demonstrated clearly that children perceived information quite differently than did adults. With the folktales children at the preoperational stage were most concerned with safety and not letting oneself get into dangerous or uncontrollable situations. One child cautioned that one should "never go across dangerous bridges," (Jean 6:2) a typical response with the folktale selections. The young child perhaps has no notion of becoming independent and cannot perceive of him or herself as a unit capable of functioning alone without a safety net. From this vantage point the child sits in judgment and suggests it is best to stay out of dangerous settings and away from dangerous elements. This closely matches adult input for this age child. Children are frequently warned about strangers, not answering the door, not getting into cars, not playing or walking alone etc. Children have safety as a concern which certainly differs from the older child's preoccupation with survival stories which pit the child safely against the elements through narratives. The kindergarten children reminded the interviewer again and again that two little pigs did not survive the ordeal and that the Gingerbread Boy did not either. Character motivation was not a factor in determining outcome. The fact that the pigs and cookie were foolish did
not enter into thematic statements. The child's concern was surviving versus not surviving. Making foolish mistakes or claims did not diminish the child's preoccupation with safety, supporting Mandler and Johnson's (1977) findings regarding the young child's inability to consider internal motivation, which was quite the opposite from the findings with realistic fiction.

A common response for THE THREE LITTLE PIGS or THE GINGERBREAD BOY was "they both got eaten up," in reference to the two pigs and the cookie. This was too general to be considered a thematic statement, but it is nonetheless an early developmental formation of theme. The children had pulled out an important main idea, but could not link it to other thoughts or ideas in the story. Mary (5:6), like 11 other children, made a similar statement, but was able to expand the thought by adding that the story ended like it did because "you can't blow down brick houses." Concretely they were able to capture the essence of the three pig's dilemmas.

Consequently, the young child's perspective, although widely varying from the adult perspective, can clearly be seen as a developmental function of age. The context in which the thematic statements were generated frequently began at a literal level. Children in kindergarten and second grade used the book throughout the interview and seemed better able to talk about the concepts with the book as a handy reference. Examples were cited while pointing to the book, as if to show the interviewer concretely that the ideas were substantiated within the text itself. All but three of the kindergarten children used the books as references. The three children not opening the books were from
non-literature based classrooms and seemed ill at ease during the interview sessions. When invited to open the books to help jog their memories, the children would not take the invitation which was repeated several times. The second grade children used the books as references quite differently. Some opened the books, but most of the children pointed to the books or held the books during the interviews without opening them. Fourth grade children rarely opened or touched the books, but would occasionally nod in the direction of the book under discussion. This indicated a literal movement from the concrete toward the abstract across age levels. Younger children used the books as a concrete object to assist in the ordering and encoding of meaning. Without the books acting as catalysts and handy references, the conversations would have been quite different.

The second grade sample used for this study had less to say about folktales than the other two groups. Three of the boys did not like "fairy tales" as mentioned earlier, in contrast to Favat's (1977) conclusions regarding the preferences for fairytales for this age level. The boys saw the tales as foolish or silly and expressed a preference for realistic fiction novels. For this study it would be difficult to determine if other children shared this view, but did not express a preference. This reveals something of the nature of what children want to read and respond to, and has strong implications for how teachers structure reading time in the classroom. Context was crucial in determining how the scores were interpreted.

Twenty five per cent of the children responded by choosing the two books that did not match SNOW WHITE. Their choices reflected a book
that they viewed as so different that the other two had to match. When asked to explain this choice the children offered the following type of explanation:

"Nothing happens to the princess in this one. They don't get almost killed."

"Because book two had a part that had hate in it and these two don't." (Mary 7:11)

The pivot for not choosing Snow White seemed to be the severity of the cruelty she suffered.

Being married was a preoccupation of the boys and the girls in the second grade interviews. The ending was mentioned by almost all of the children. In fact, 15% suggested that the princess in The Swineherd was also married, perhaps due to the traditional expectation that folktales end happily and that happiness is embodied in being married. Zwerger's nontraditional ending was missed by three of the children who maintained predictably that the prince and the princess were married.

Being the prettiest and being in love was mentioned by 6 of the girls as important thematic elements at a concrete level, but was not mentioned by the boys. Boys were more concerned with the lesson the princess learned, or the evil in Snow White that was overcome. Both sexes mentioned the hate that prevailed in Tattercoats and there was a general condemnation or censure toward the old grandfather who refused to forget about his daughter's death and go on with life. The most common type of thematic response was that the books were about
loving others and not being mean.

Children's concerns with these selections differed from adult subject's answers on several points. Twenty per cent of the fourth grade children chose THE STONECUTTER by Gerald McDermott and DAWN by Molly Bang as matched selections (as did four adults) and were able to substantiate their choices with text-congruent thematic statements. For example, Marie (9:5) made her choice of DAWN and THE STONECUTTER based on the fact that metamorphosis occurs.

"Cause well this one, Tasaka can change into all these things. And in this one Dawn's mother changes into a bird. Well she was a bird first then changed into a mother. Then she changed into a bird again."

Her thoughts were too generally stated, but they were text-congruent. Dick (10:2) extended this attitude toward change by stating the following:

"The Stonecutter he tried, he didn't want to be a stonecutter anymore so he went to god. He went to the mountain god and wanted to change and wanted to change and so he changed into a whole bunch of different stuff and in this (THE JAPANESE FAIRYTALE) he went to god to the god and he wanted to be, they both went to the god to see what they wanted to be."

His continued repetition and rephrasing suggests a verbal thought process, a working out of his ideas aloud as he attempted to state theme.
The notion of greed appeared in 25% of the fourth grade children's responses as linking ideas between DAWN and THE STONECUTTER. Four of the adult subjects also linked those two books based on the idea of greed. Some of the children linked the other two books but chose to talk about THE STONECUTTER in terms of theme. As Jeremy (9:5) said: "He gets a taste of his own medicine."

At another level of theme a preoccupation with being right appeared with the older children as mentioned with realistic fiction. Andrew (10:2) concluded his statement of theme for THE STONECUTTER with, "but I picked these two. Was I right or wrong?" He had chosen to explore his feelings regarding the book that appealed to him, but he was concerned that there might be a hidden agenda, and although the interviewer had not veered him away from his topic of choice, Andrew was concerned that he might be responding incorrectly. While walking to and from classrooms, informal talks with the fourth grade children revealed a deep concern for being right or correct. Children would say "See, I was right. I told you I was." Children wanted to be reassured that their answers were right, but they also enjoyed the informal sessions and wanted to hear more stories, longer stories as one boy suggested. The children clearly enjoyed being given further opportunities to talk about themes in books as an extension of the read aloud sessions. Reading aloud to children has long been relegated to early grades. In this school, however, children were read aloud to at all ages and their enjoyment of these sessions was apparent. In several classrooms, research times conflicted with daily read aloud times and children stayed in the classrooms until read alouds were finished. This happened with all three grade levels, and was
most apparent in the literature based classrooms.

3. CHILDREN'S RESPONSES WHICH WERE NOT TEXT-CONGRUENT

Response to Realistic Fiction

At this level responses were few in number. Most of the answers which were rated low on the Thematic Scale were congruent with the text, but below the level of concrete theme. Pete's answer typified the kind of response considered as not text-congruent or too vague and offered by 100% of the children in the low kindergarten group, 60% of the children in the low second grade group and 30% of the children in the low fourth grade group. When asked what the most important ideas in TITCH were he replied that "instruments can break." (Pete 5:0) This answer had nothing whatsoever to do with the story of TITCH by Pat Hutchins, except for a superficial link to illustrations that showed the children with instruments. The child attempted to generate a thematic statement, but was unable to and received a score of one on the scale. At another point in the interview he tried again to link ideas in the stories.

Pete (5:0): They're something like it, like carrots and popcorn.
I: How is it alike?
P: Cause there's two foods in it.
I: What do you think both authors were trying to teach you when they wrote those books?
P: Teach you they're both the same.
I: What's both the same?
A conversation with Michael (5:4) illustrated the importance of negotiating meaning throughout the interview session as terms became defined and the search for theme continued. It also illustrated the impact that other books can have on book sharing experiences and the encoding of theme. Michael had heard the sequel to TITCH and could not divorce the two when talking about theme. The second Hutchin's book deals even more strongly with the concept of size and outgrowing clothing and becoming bigger. This background knowledge about Titch's character was intertwined in Michael's repertoire of knowledge and affected his answers, which were congruent when taken as a whole. In fact, this prior knowledge actually enriched Michael's answers and gave them a depth not found in many of the other answers. Michael's statements show how context builds with subsequent book encounters to form a cohesive whole. (See Appendix B for complete transcript.) The whole context reveals what the child brings to the book sharing experience and shows how information is networked to create cohesiveness in the child's response to literature. Isolating events might suggest incongruency, however, book experiences can be seen as linked events which build on each other and give texture to the child's response.

Many of the children in kindergarten and grade two tended to speak in absolutes when characterizing themes for stories heard. This tendency resulted in the inclusion of misinformation in thematic statements. This tendency was also noted with one-fourth of the adult
responses which included concepts like always or never and thus relegated the thematic statements to a lower position on the scale. For example, Becky (7:9) stated that: “Even if you don’t think you like the person it always ends up that you like the person.” In this story this was the case for one interchange between two characters, however, as an absolute statement of theme it was incorrect.

Another type of incongruency was vagueness in answers that matched nothing in particular. Important ideas were identified by Amy (8:1) as: “to be your friend.” The thought goes nowhere and leaves more unstated than stated. No point of view is suggested and the “your” does not link to a general you or a specific character from the book. Amy and certain other children were unable to bring thoughts to completion throughout the interviews in conjunction with other types of questions.

Children at the fourth grade level seemed better able to characterize theme for realistic fiction across group levels and really did not include theme statements that were incongruent with the text. Lower scale ratings generally corresponded to ideas that were too vague or too absolute, but were congruent with the text. Developmentally this indicated a greater facility with adherence to the text for realistic fiction.

Response to Folktales

With folktales the children injected much more misinformation about the text into their comments than with realistic fiction. The stories were more complex, longer, had more events to remember, had more character interactions, but were also more familiar to the children.
Most of the children had at least heard versions of the folktales used or had heard one book at home or in the classroom. Not text-congruent statements, included 80% of the kindergarten children in the low group, 70% of the second grade children in the low group, and 80% of the low fourth grade group. In the high exposure groups 10% of the kindergarten children, 30% of the second grade children and 20% of the fourth grade children included vague or incorrect information in their responses.

A typical response (to THE THREE LITTLE PIGS and THE GINGERBREAD BOY) was vague and undefined. "They both ate them." (Rick 5:6). Other responses were absolute and sounded good on the surface, but were not really thematically congruent. "Never go across dangerous bridges." (Jane 6:2) Although sounding good on the surface, it was impractical and not congruent with the events that unfolded in the story.

Some of the children indicated a basic understanding of a character's internal dilemma and struggle, but they responded with absolute values that were not really appropriate in relation to the larger context. What was noteworthy was the child's attitude toward life, the definite black/white value system that emerged when talking about stories and how characters behaved. At this level of thematic response children viewed events rather unidimensionally. Rather than seeing life choices as a complex weave, they tended to react moralistically, almost parallel to morals given for fables, thereby reflecting developmental stages of growth. For example, Tana's (9:7) response in reference to THE STONECUTTER was: "Be what you are, I guess. Be what you are and don't change it." This type of decisive statement was meant to be an endorsement of how things should be. It became an overstatement of the
stonecutter's dilemma, a static state in order to avoid problems. Sensitivity to the complexity of choice comes with age and life experience and was lacking in the statements that moralized. In contrast, were the answers that showed a delicate sensitivity to the themes of the books. "Well, don't underestimate your friends; they can be nice people" (Dave 10:1—in reference to THY FRIEND, OBADIAH and STEVIE). For the most part, the latter types of statements emerged in conversations with children with a high literature exposure and have already been described in detail. Statements at these levels tended to include qualifiers which revealed that the students were aware of other options or other choices available. "You can get mad at people and you can still be friends" (Chris: 9:2—in reference to STEVIE). Statements rated high on the Thematic Scale were more open ended.

Some children altered story events to match their own individual story schema and background knowledge, which coincided with Spiro's study of influence of background (1977). For example, three children decided that the princess in THE SWINEHERD got married to the prince in the end. This made generating theme difficult, because the two thematically linked romances also ended with successful marriages. What this did suggest was the child's strong sense of story, the child's expectations for story parts, in this instance happy endings and successful marriages, and the child's ability to reconstruct a story based on what the child knows to be logical. In other words, as Spiro and Anderson have suggested in studies with background building and the instantiation of meaning, the children had background knowledge which definitely did not mesh with a princess sitting alone out in the rain at
the end of a "fairytale." Instead, children instantiated a happy ending schema to complete the tale in a satisfying manner. The role of prior expectations in terms of predicting what will be read on the page is a strong factor in building reading and listening fluency.

Another type of response linked books correctly in the identification task, but for unjustifiable reasons. Patricia (10:2) stated that: "They're basically, they're both in foreign countries." When pressed further she added: "They both have boats." When asked what the books taught she stated: "About what happens in foreign countries." She did not understand the stories and did not listen well during the reading. The realistic fiction seemed more accessible to these children, in part due to the shorter length, and in part due to the concrete nature of the stories. The folktales were too remote or complex to command attention and they were unable to piece them together individually as cohesive stories with meanings that linked to other books. Patricia's continual reference to "foreign countries" and her confused references to the events of the stories suggested an unwillingness or inability to understand stories that did not link directly to her own frame of reference or world view. Patricia's conversation suggested a limited range of response for this type of story genre and a limited interest in stories about other cultures. This indicated the lack of rich background that Pearson (1981) refers to, which builds up over time with exposure and familiarity. This lack of background knowledge also had a limiting effect on Patricia's ability to generate theme.
SUMMARY

Children were tested with a literature inventory which divided the sample into two significantly different groups by grade, and were then labelled the high literature exposure group and the low literature exposure group. The child's ability to identify thematically matched books was greater than the child's ability to explain those choices, suggesting perhaps that the ability to identify theme may be a fairly early developing strategy. This tacit level of knowledge was present across grade and group levels. The high literature exposure groups were able to give thematic statements which were either adult congruent or text congruent more often than children from low literature exposure groups. In each measure of the child's ability to generate theme there was a strong relation between the child's score on the Revised Huck Literature Inventory and the score on the Thematic Scale significant beyond the .05 level for all three grades.

Children generated almost twice as many text congruent responses as adult congruent responses indicating an awareness of theme in books heard which differed from adult responses. The children's responses differed by degree and perspective from adult responses and showed a world view unique to the child. Children's concerns differed from adult concerns and were apparent in the thematic responses. Some children offered answers that were incongruent with the text. As a result, three categories emerged naturally from an analysis of the transcripts of children's interviews: 1) adult congruent; 2) text congruent; and 3) not text congruent. This emphasis on the text congruent responses of children as valid thematic responses challenges past research which has
largely ignored the child's point of view and has concluded that children are not adept at generating overarching concepts for materials heard.

In all three grades there was an upward parallel growth pattern in ability to generate theme by age, in relation to score on the RHLI. The mean difference between each grade level for both genres was approximately 3.3 for kindergarten, 3.7 for second grade, and 4.3 for fourth grade for both high and low groups of children. Within grades the mean difference for both genres between the high and low groups was wider, varying from 1.95 to 4.7 for kindergarten, 2.5 to 4.95 for grade two and 3.25 to 5.4 for fourth grade on the Thematic Scale. An important finding of the study was that kindergarten children with high RHLI scores averaged higher scores for both genres than the low exposure second and fourth grade groups of children.

In order to arrive at successfully stated themes, kindergarten children with a high exposure to children's literature went through an oral process of summarizing the stories prior to giving thematic statements which challenges Applebee's developmental perspective which states that the 2-6 year old child does not summarize stories or encode overarching meaning for stories, but rather retells entire stories or gives decentered fragments that are not cohesive. Five year old children in the present study were quite adept at summarizing stories when asked to do so.

Furthermore, second and fourth grade children with a high exposure to children's literature were also able to analyze and generalize stories, further challenging Applebee's notion that the child in the concrete operational stage of development cannot typically abstract meaning from
Fourth grade children, aged 8-11, clearly enjoyed the oral reading of folktales or fairytales, challenging Favat's (1977) notion that interest for fairytales peaks between the ages of 6-8 and drops off sharply afterwards.

Children had strong prior expectations for story parts and at times instantiated familiar story frames to fit with expectations, even when the content did not mesh with the story. Background knowledge was also an important part of understanding content of stories and children, particularly those with a low exposure to literature, at times offered a limited range of responses due to an unfamiliarity with actual story content. This had a tendency to limit thematic responses.

Thematic statements of 14 kindergarten children had internal motivation or reactions of characters embedded within them. Understanding how characters thought and felt about situations seemed to be intrinsic to the child's understanding of theme and affected their ability to talk about overarching concepts of books heard. In spontaneous recall Mandler and Johnson found that children ignored internal reactions of characters, but it would not be accurate to say that children are not aware of internal reactions or motivations of characters in stories heard. When asked to tell about the stories or to tell why stories ended as they did children had no difficulty discussing internal reactions. On the contrary, the thematic answers were often a result of the child's reflections on character motivation.
CHAPTER V
SUMMARY, FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, SUGGESTIONS AND
RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE STUDY

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The major purposes of this study were to: 1) describe the child’s ability to identify and generate theme using children’s literature; 2) determine what effect using two different genres of children’s literature would have on the child’s ability to identify or generate theme; 3) describe the development of that ability with kindergarten, second and fourth grade children; and lastly, 4) determine whether an exposure to children’s literature would affect the child’s ability to identify or generate theme.

The study focused on the following questions:
1. How do kindergarten, second and fourth grade children verbalize themes heard in stories and is there a pattern of thematic responses across age levels?
2. Will children be able to identify two books with similar themes?
3. Can children generate themes which match two books?
4. Will there be differences in ability to identify and generate theme between children with a high exposure to children’s literature and
children with a low exposure to children's literature?

5. Will the use of two different genres, realistic fiction and folktales, affect the child's ability to identify or generate theme?

METHODS AND PROCEDURES

A pilot study was given to second and fourth grade children to field test procedures and determine the amount of time necessary to read three books and interview students individually. As a result of this test, as well as input from other teachers, the following procedures were used.

Sample. Sixty subjects, 20 at each of three grade levels, were chosen from a school in an upper middle class suburb of a large midwestern city on the basis of a score on the Revised Huck Literature Inventory, an inventory that had previously been used to determine children's levels of literary knowledge. The inventory, written in 1960, was revised to include current titles and to delete titles which were no longer widely available in libraries or book stores. The revised version was field tested and reliability was established at .8. Two groups, determined to be significantly different, were comprised of ten children in a high literature exposure group and ten children in a low literature exposure group.

Procedures. Small groups of children were given brief instructions as to what a theme was and then listened to three illustrated children's books in an informal school setting. As a time delay factor they were then asked to draw a captioned picture about the two books which shared
the same theme or ideas. After about ten minutes had elapsed the
children were individually interviewed by the researcher with an open
ended format which was designed to elicit thematic response. This task
occurred twice, once with realistic fiction and once with folktales. The
interviews were tape recorded and notes were taken by the researcher.

Analyses of the data. Children’s matched choices were tabulated
and compared to adult choices. For the task relating to the generation of
theme, the thematic responses from the taped interviews were compiled
and rated using the Thematic Scale, a scale based upon an instrument
developed by Otto (1968) in a main idea study and adapted for use in this
study as a thematic tool to determine the child’s level of thematic
response. Interrater agreement of 92.5% was established for the
Thematic Scale by an independent rater, a doctoral candidate in
children’s literature and reading at The Ohio State University.

Three categories emerged from analysis of the transcripts which
were adult congruent, text congruent and not text congruent. Responses
of children were tabulated and charted under the three categories and
descriptively analyzed to determine patterns of response within and
across grade levels.

Statistical analysis of the data. A three by two analysis of variance
was performed on each literature measurement which were Thematic
Scale score for both realistic fiction and folktales. The two main
effects were age of subject and score on the Revised Huck Literature
Inventory. Correlations were also measured between scores on the RHLI
and the Thematic Scale.
SUMMARY OF THE FINDINGS

The findings of this study will be examined as they relate to the sample of children tested for this investigation and the questions which were the focus of this investigation.

1. How do kindergarten, second and fourth grade children verbalize themes heard in stories and is there a pattern of thematic responses across age levels?

Kindergarten children verbalized themes for books heard in relation to exposure to children's literature. Children having a low exposure to good children's books most frequently responded at levels too general to be considered thematic responses. In contrast, children familiar with a broad range of children's literature typically responded to interview questions with thematic statements that were at or above concrete levels on the Thematic Scale used to rate responses.

Second grade children paralleled kindergarten response patterns at a slightly higher thematic level. That is, the low exposure group generated a range of thematic responses that included answers at the concrete level of stating theme and the high exposure group included more abstract thematic responses to books heard, than did the high kindergarten group. This indicated a developmental trend across group levels within and across grades.

Fourth grade children continued the developmental parallel growth pattern of thematic response across grade and group levels, but included more variety within the low group in response to realistic fiction. This indicated a developmental awareness of themes for realistic fiction and
a facility with generating a statement in that genre. At this grade level the high exposure group generated more abstract thematic statements than any other group.

2. Will children be able to identify two books with similar themes? Kindergarten children were able to identify thematically matched books 80% of the time for realistic fiction and 35% of the time for folktales across literary knowledge levels, thus indicating that thematic identification is a fairly early developmental strategy. Second grade children were able to identify thematically matched books 100% of the time for realistic fiction and 60% of the time for folktales. Fourth grade children were able to identify thematically matched books 100% of the time for realistic fiction and 60% of the time for folktales. As an identification task only, children in second and fourth grades matched adult choices more often than kindergarten, particularly with folktales, suggesting that world view or perspective is more closely aligned to that of the adult as the child matures. The selections reported here are only a summary of identification choices which matched adult choices. Not taken into account were the child's own choices which disagreed with adult responses, but were congruent with book.

3. Can children generate themes which match two books? All children interviewed, except for one child in the second grade who did not understand the concept of theme or idea, attempted to match two books which were perceived as being thematically matched selections. Furthermore, all children, except for the second grade child,
attempted to generate thematic statements for books heard. The level of success varied from child to child depending primarily on group position (high or low exposure to literature), however, each child, but one, addressed the question as to why the books were chosen as having similar ideas. Children often chose to respond to one book as the interview progressed and these responses were rated for thematic level.

4. Will there be differences in ability to identify and generate theme between children with a high exposure to children’s literature and children with a low exposure to children’s literature?

There were no significant differences in ability to identify a theme between children with a high or low exposure to children’s literature except for the second grade sample with folktales. However a strong correlation existed between exposure to children’s literature as rated by the Revised Huck Literature Inventory and ability to state theme as rated by the score on the Thematic Scale significant beyond the .05 level, as well as significant differences beyond the .05 level as revealed by analysis of variance between genre, thematic score and position in high or low group, which increased as a function of age. What this suggests is that children were able to identify thematically matched books at tacit levels regardless of literary background knowledge. However, a child’s ability to verbalize clear thematic statements for books heard was directly related to the natural setting used for this study in addition to the child’s literary knowledge prior to the read aloud sessions.

Three categories of response emerged from an analysis of the interview transcripts which were: adult congruent, text congruent and
not text congruent. Children most frequently responded during the interview sessions with text congruent theme statements, which differed from adult responses, but were congruent with the books themselves, thus indicating a perspective that differed greatly from that of the adult. Previous studies (Otto et al., 1968; Christie & Schumacher, 1975; Tierney et al., 1978-79; Baumann, 1981) have generated main idea answers against which children's answers were compared. Different in those instances meant incorrect. Since the child's perspective has not previously been taken into account, existing data regarding the child's ability or inability to generate thematic statements does not give a total picture of the child's capabilities.

Since real books with illustrations were not used in previous studies, the data gathering situations were somewhat unnatural, thereby, diminishing the total context and deleting an important aspect of the print setting to which children are accustomed. In this study, children continually handled the books in kindergarten and grade two, thus revealing their reliance on the physical text to produce responses to the book. The younger children opened the books and used them as they talked, pointing to characters or objects, or they simply talking about episodes while pointing to the illustrations for reinforcement. The second grade children held the books close throughout the interview sessions and referred to them constantly. Fourth grade children did not touch or hold the books, however, they continually pointed to the books as reference points throughout the discussions. Furthermore, the use of three children's books in a read aloud format may have assisted the child in identifying theme and organizing abstract information for the
generation of theme as a result of having a choice between three books.

The open ended framework used to interview students must also be taken into consideration. Students were allowed to verbally explore and pursue their own lines of reasoning as they responded to the books, often following their own interests and concerns to which the interviewer responded in an interested manner, eventually leading the conversation back to the task at hand. This format was seen as an invaluable approach in eliciting full responses from the children. The open ended nature of the interview sessions actually assisted some children in generating theme statements that did not emerge initially with spontaneous recall types of questions. Some children seemed to need time to talk about the books from a variety of perspectives, which began with the concrete and moved toward the abstract. This was seen as building meaning throughout the interview session. In previous studies questions as used in this study have not been used. The interview format asked students to consider the books from different perspectives. It asked them to make potential changes in the plot or ending, or to consider the author's perspective. It specifically asked them to summarize or consider theme, which spontaneous recall as used in previous research does not.

Several children were also able to negotiate meaning throughout the interview session, which a rigid format would not have allowed. One kindergarten boy typified this type of negotiation of meaning in that he wanted clues from the interviewer which resulted in a game of give and take. The interviewer did not initially understand his position, nor did the young child understand the interviewer. The result was, however, that the boy finally conveyed his lack of understanding regarding the task
at hand and the interviewer was finally able to explain the task in language that he could comprehend. The end result was that the child generated a thematic statement which would not have otherwise emerged.

An important finding of the study regarding the child's ability to generate theme was that kindergarten children with a high exposure to children's literature scored higher on the Thematic Scale than did second and fourth grade children with a low exposure to children's literature. This indicated that for the sample of children used, children's literature improved the younger child's ability to verbalize ideas regarding theme when compared to older children without the same book experiences, and this ability increased with age.

Children in kindergarten were also able to summarize stories heard, which an earlier study indicated was not developmentally appropriate. This ability to summarize assisted children in their verbalizations of theme, often stated at concrete levels, by providing a framework of the story which included literal or main ideas. Children at this age level were also aware of internal motivations or reactions of characters, which assisted the child in determining themes of books heard. Knowing how or why the characters responded as they did in particular episodes was often included in thematic responses. This supports the idea that children do take on the perspectives of others, but that the child's perspective may differ from the adult perspective.

Furthermore, second and fourth grade children, particularly those with a high exposure to children's literature, were able to respond to stories with thematic statements which were at analysis and
generalization response levels in Applebee's Developmental Formulation of Response Categories. This finding was contrary to Applebee's study which asserts that children in the concrete operational stages of development typically are unable to analyze and generalize thematically about stories.

Young children used concrete language as they verbalized theme for books heard, which adults typically identify as being metaphorical language. With young children, the ability to create concrete thematic statements may be an early development of the ability to generate metaphors. The children's awareness of the metaphorical aspect of the statements was below their ability to generate such statements.

Older children in this study were best able to generate thematic statements which matched adult responses. The quality of the language used was most complex with the fourth grade high exposure literature group of children. In fact, some of the statements made by the fourth grade children exceeded statements made by adult subjects based on the Thematic Scale and the language used for the themes, suggesting that the fourth grade child with varied book experiences can match adult responses when the text is at their level.

At times children had strong prior expectations for story parts. Consequently, children instantiated familiar story frames to fit with prior expectations, even when the information did not mesh with the book itself. This suggests that children will fill in confusing or missing information based on predictable patterns that they have evolved for stories.

Children with a low exposure to literature at times indicated by
their responses, a limited amount of background knowledge about story content, which Pearson (1981) suggests is so important for comprehension. This limited the range of responses to the books during the interview and subsequently limited thematic responses.

For the all three grade levels a developmental perspective emerged regarding the child’s ability to generate theme. The gender of the student was not seen as a factor in determining the quality of responses. Boys and girls were distributed across groups and ability levels. The Thematic Scale allowed a careful analysis of the child’s statements, rather than determining whether an answer was correct or incorrect. At the level of two, where many of the kindergarten low group children fell, the early development of the child’s ability to state theme could be seen. At this level on the scale, the child was beginning to grapple with thematic content, but at a level too general to be considered a true theme statement. This level of response occurred most often with the young child in the low exposure group.

Children at all age levels offered truisms or concrete rules as thematic statements. “Don’t go across bridges.” “Don’t run away from home.” “Be proud of what you are and never change.” Children in low exposure groups tended to speak in absolutes, whereas children with a high literature exposure tended to offer qualifiers in their responses to books. “You can get mad at people and you can still be friends.”

5. Will the use of two different genres, realistic fiction and folktales, affect the child’s ability to identify or generate theme?

Children were most successful with the identification of realistic
fiction as reported in question two. Part of this may be attributed to the fact that everyday themes, as found in realistic fiction, are closer to the child, are more a direct part of the child's realm of life experience. Folktale themes of greed, sacrifice, romance, overcoming evil or danger are more abstract concepts, embedded in complex stories with unfamiliar settings and many episodes and character motivations to consider. Fourth grade children indicated a strong liking for the folktales which were read aloud, challenging findings by Favat (1977) which suggest that interest in fairy tales peaks between the ages of 6-8 and falls off sharply after that age. Regardless of group position children were able to successfully identify realistic fiction selections which matched adult choices. This suggests a tacit knowledge of how the world operates.

With generation of theme tasks children showed mixed abilities across grade and group levels when dealing with two different literature genres. Kindergarten children scored higher with folktales than with realistic fiction, when the text congruent responses were taken into consideration. From their own perspectives children were best able to talk about themes of folktales. Children's responses in the low group were still well below the concrete level of ability in stating theme. In contrast, the high group scored slightly above the concrete levels of stating theme, which meant that the high literature exposure group was able to state themes for both genres heard.

Second grade children were best able to talk about themes of realistic fiction books. The books dealing with the problems involved with friendship seemed to elicit more abstract thematic responses
linking both selections, than did the folktales, although the differences were more noticeable with the high exposure group. The average of the low group for both genres was still below the concrete level of stating theme, compared to the high group which was above the concrete level of stating theme.

Fourth grade children in the low exposure group had more success with realistic fiction than with folktales. The latter was below the level of concrete theme, whereas with realistic fiction the children were successful with generating concrete themes. In the high group children had a large number of abstractly stated thematic statements for both genres. Only two responses of the 20 responses in the high group were below the concrete levels of stating theme.

CONCLUSIONS

The following conclusions were generated based on the findings related to the ability of the children selected for the study to identify and generate theme statements. They relate to this specific population and setting.

The Relation Between the Generation of Theme and Exposure to Quality Children's Literature

1. A strong relation existed between a child's ability to generate theme and a child's exposure to children's literature.

2. A developmental pattern of ability to generate theme existed as measured by a Thematic Scale. The growth from kindergarten to fourth
grade was significant as it related to the child's exposure to children's literature as measured by a literature inventory.

3. Kindergarten children with a high exposure to children's literature were able to generate theme statements for books heard. Kindergarten children with a low exposure to children's literature did not typically generate thematic statements for books heard but did attempt to generate thematic statements and showed an early indication of thematic development. Their statements were typically too general or too vague to be considered thematic or included misinformation regarding the text.

4. Kindergarten children were able to summarize stories heard which directly affected their ability to generate theme statements.

5. Kindergarten children were able to verbalize statements related to the Internal motivations or reactions of characters, which were in turn seen as links to the generation of thematic statements.

6. Second and fourth grade children were able to analyze and generalize themes for stories heard. This was particularly true for children with a high exposure to children's literature.

7. Fourth grade children with a high exposure to children's literature were able to generate thematic statements for graded materials which closely paralleled statements made by adults.

8. Second and fourth grade children had more difficulty generating theme statements for folktales than for realistic fiction.

9. Fourth grade children were facile with generating theme statements for realistic fiction regardless of position in high or low literature exposure group.
10. At times children had strong prior expectations for story parts, and consequently instantiated familiar story frames to fit with their expectations for the story, which in turn affected thematic response.

11. Children with a low exposure to literature, at times indicated through their responses, a limited amount of background knowledge, which had a tendency to limit thematic response.

12. Fourth grade children indicated that they enjoy folktales.

The Child's Ability to Identify Theme

1. All three age levels tested were able to identify thematically matched realistic fiction books at high levels of accuracy, whereas all three age levels had more difficulty selecting thematically matched folktales. Identifying theme may be a strategy that develops early in children.

2. Children's choices for thematically matched books often differed from adult choices, but were found to be text congruent during interview session. The child's perspective reflected the child's view of the world and was therefore limited by degree. This perspective was evident in children's explanations for thematically matched books.

DISCUSSION

The following discussion centers on findings regarding the research context, which employed a natural setting. The second part offers suggestions for the classroom based on findings of the study. Part three explores areas for future research in the development of theme.
THE RESEARCH CONTEXT

The use of physical texts from children's literature as a research tool elicited a high quality of response from children in kindergarten, second and fourth grade classrooms. Having the choice between three books to explore the concept of theme was a procedure not used before. This choice may have assisted the child in his or her formulation of thematic response, since it helped the child match books which shared similar ideas.

Children used the illustrations as referents, used the books themselves while talking about themes, and seemed more comfortable having the books nearby to touch, open or point to. The use of a natural context in which children sat close to the researcher on a couch or on a rug in the familiar environment of the school seemed to diminish the sterile quality often common to research.

Using a time delay activity which was concretely related to the read aloud task gave children time to focus on the task at hand. Drawing a picture with a caption about the two books which shared the same theme assisted the children in focusing on which books were thematically matched, gave them time to establish a physical drawing as a reference point to explore their thoughts, and forced them to mentally verbalize a thematic statement for the caption. This type of concrete activity is seen as a natural extension of the child's developmental growth and ability, which is premised on the links made between the abstract and the concrete.

The interview format which followed was open ended by design and elicited a wide range of responses from children interviewed and seemed
to spark responses at different points. Some children had ideas firmly
fixed from the beginning. Other children began with the concrete and
moved toward thematic statements. The times for each child varied
depending on what the child had to say. This freedom during response
time was less inhibiting for the children and consequently elicited a
large body of information about the books under consideration. The
questions themselves asked the children to consider perspectives other
than their own, which has not previously been done with thematic
response research. Previous research has used spontaneous recall or
retellings of stories with the result that children did not summarize
stories or specifically consider themes or internal motivation of
characters. This is not to say that they are unable to do so.

SUGGESTIONS FOR TEACHING

Teachers have traditionally encouraged children to respond to books
in a manner which is closely aligned to the adult world view and
perspective. Children's thematic responses have been rated as correct or
incorrect based upon this predetermined body of information. In
contrast, the children in this study were encouraged to respond freely to
the books shared with them. As a result, their thematic responses
reflected their own unique world views and perspectives, based upon
their levels of development and awareness of the world around them.
Their thematic responses to the books indicated a perception of the
world different from that of the adult, a perception which is not usually
valued in the classroom since it differs from the adult response. In fact,
the entire nature of the interview format suggested a different stance
towards the child's response. Children were encouraged to talk, to give their own opinions. It is the open ended nature of the response situation and the child's exposure to children's literature which elicited such a high level of thematic response, and paralleled many of the classrooms from which the children came.

Since exposure to children's literature had such a strong correlation to the child's level of thematic awareness teachers need to provide students with rich literature experiences such as those sampled in the RHLI. The genres ranged from poetry to fantasy, from realistic fiction to folktales. This exposure to books increases the child's background knowledge about the world and provides the child with a network of information upon which future book experiences build. In providing book sharing experiences using a high quality of literature the teacher is able to extend the child's perceptions of the world through discussion, writing and concrete extensions, which in turn improves comprehension, word knowledge and vocabulary (Cohen, 1968; Cullinan et.al., 1974). Oral language after the book sharing experience is to be valued because it allows the child to respond to the book, explore thematic meaning and sort out new information, much as the children did during interviews in this study. Accepting the child's response without labelling it as correct or incorrect is important in building the child's ability to make conceptual connections from book to book and from book experience to life experience. The teacher's stance toward response must alter if children are to be encouraged to explore the thematic meaning they find in books.
RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

The present study explored the richness of using real children's books in natural settings with natural conversation as a response tool to explore thematic meaning in books shared. Since the sample was limited to 60 children from one school the results are not generalizable. Similar studies with different age levels of children in different socioeconomic settings would be useful for comparison and validation. Specific recommendations follow:

1. An ethnographic study following a small group of children throughout the school year in several different grades would provide a developmental perspective of the child's ability to explore theme in a variety of situations. Older elementary children could be included since this study did not use children beyond the fourth grade.

2. To explore the development of theme in the young child, a preschool sample would be useful to study to compare to the results found for the kindergarten sample.

3. Since kindergarten children have not been previously studied in natural situations and have been considered below the level of being able to generate thematic statements, other studies like this one could explore how kindergarten children learn to form thematic concepts in book situations.

4. Using videotaping equipment would provide for an analysis of verbal and nonverbal behavior during the book sharing events as well as during the interview sessions. This could validate the significance of the physical text as being part of the context.

5. Recording students at different intervals using the same books
would provide a view of thematic response which would give information as to how successive encounters with the same books alter the child's perception of theme.

6. It would be useful to videotape students in small group sessions, negotiating thematic meaning with peers. This would provide a perspective of the child offering information based upon his or her own world view and then sharing or defending this perspective with other children.

7. Treatment comparing the use of children's literature in a literature based classroom versus the traditional teaching in a basal based classroom might provide important insights as to how the child develops an ability to specify theme.
APPENDICES
Appendix A
Parental Permission Letters
Dear Parents of Barrington Kindergarteners, Second- and Fourth-Graders:

I am a doctoral student (and former teacher) in reading education at OSU. I am beginning my dissertation study to complete the requirements for the doctoral degree in reading education. The study I am proposing is one that will explore how children build meaning when they read books. I will specifically explore how they identify themes in children's books. I feel that this study can reveal much about how children read for meaning and link stories to each other. This can have a direct effect on expanding our knowledge of the reading process and on improving reading instruction.

I am writing this letter to enlist your aid in my study. Specifically, I am requesting your permission to allow your kindergarten, second- or fourth-grader to participate as a subject in my study.

I will randomly choose sixty students (who have their parents' permission) to participate in the study. Children will work with me in groups of three for two 30-minute sessions. The sessions will be identical except for the stories used. Each child will: 1) listen to three stories; 2) complete two theme-related tasks through writing; and 3) answer several questions about the story to determine meaning. In addition, I will administer a brief reading inventory to all participants in the study. The activities are similar to those which occur in a normal reading lesson.

All testing will occur within the confines of the school building. The anonymity of each child participating in this study will be strictly protected. This study has the approval of Dr. Wilson in the Upper Arlington School District Office and Mr. Oakley, the Barrington principal.

In order to grant permission for your child's participation, please sign the note attached to this letter and return it to school as soon as possible. If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study, please contact me at 614-422-0711 (campus). I will be happy to furnish you with more details. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Susan Lehr

I grant permission for my child, __________________________, to participate in the dissertation study of Susan Lehr as described in the attached letter.

(Parent's signature)

College of Education
Nov. 8, 1984

Dear Parents of Barrington Kindergarten, Second- and Fourth- Graders

Last week I sent home a letter asking if your child might participate in a reading study I am conducting to complete the requirements for the Ph.D. in reading at The Ohio State University. Response has been quite good, but I am still in need of several subjects for this study. I am writing this letter to enlist your aid in my study. Specifically, I am requesting your permission to allow your kindergarten, second- or fourth- grader to participate as a subject in my study.

The study I am proposing is one that will explore how children build meaning when they read books. I will specifically explore how they identify themes in children's books. I feel that this study can reveal much about how children read for meaning and link stories to each other. This can have a direct effect on expanding our knowledge of the reading process and on improving reading instruction.

I will randomly choose sixty students (who have their parents' permission) to participate in the study. Children will work with me in groups of three for two 30 minute sessions. The sessions will be identical except for the stories used. Each child will: 1) listen to three stories; 2) complete two theme related tasks through writing; and 3) answer several questions about the story to determine meaning. In addition, I will administer a brief reading inventory to all participants in the study. The activities are similar to those which occur in a normal reading lesson.

All testing will occur within the confines of the school building. The anonymity of each child participating in this study will be strictly protected. This study has the approval of Dr. Wilson in the Upper Arlington School District Office and Mr. Oakley, the Barrington principal and Dr. Reed.

In order to grant permission for your child's participation, please sign the note attached to this letter and return it to school as soon as possible. If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study please contact me at 633-0282 (home) or 422-1257 (campus). I will be happy to furnish you with more details. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Susen Lehr

I grant permission for my child, ________________________, to participate in the dissertation study of Susen Lehr as described in the attached letter.

(Parent's signature)
Appendix B
Revised Huck Literature Inventory
1. What did Little Bo-Peep Do?
   a. She fell down.
   b. She went to sleep.
   c. She lost her sheep.

2. The old woman who lived in a shoe had so many children she
   a. spanked them all soundly.
   b. started a school.
   c. sent some to her sister.

3. The verse "Pussy-cat, Pussy-cat, Where have you been?" tells
   about a cat that
   a. bought a fat pig.
   b. visited the queen.
   c. teased the man in the moon.

4. Little Miss Muffet was badly frightened by
   a. a toad.
   b. a snake.
   c. a spider.

5. In the verse "Hey, diddle, diddle!" the cow jumped over
   a. her calf.
   b. a brook.
   c. the moon.

6. What did Little Boy Blue do?
   a. He lost his blue sweater.
   b. He fell fast asleep under the haystack.
   c. He blew his horn.

7. In "Jimmy Jet and His TV Set"
   a. Jimmy tried to eat his TV.
   b. Jimmy took off on an adventure inside his TV.
   c. Jimmy turned into a TV.

8. In "Yellow Butter Purple Jelly
   Red Jam Black Bread
   a. you say it quicker as you spread
      it thicker.
   b. a giant says munch crunch munch crunch.
   c. a little girl smears jams and jellies all over her dress.
9. The poem "The Duel" is about
   a. a gingham dog and a calico cat.
   b. two black stallions.
   c. a corporal and a private.

10. What did Mary's little lamb do?
    a. He followed her to school.
    b. He cried for his supper.
    c. He ran away and got lost.

11. The Owl and the Pussy-Cat went to see
    a. in a natty nutshell.
    b. in a spotless space ship.
    c. in a beautiful pea-green boat.

12. "I woke up this morning" tells about
    a. a child who enjoys an early morning swim.
    b. a girl who makes breakfast and messes up the kitchen.
    c. a child who gets scolded too much and decides to stay in bed tomorrow.

13. "Poem to Mud" tells how mud makes
    a. grown-ups sicker.
    b. muddy pies to give to your friend.
    c. squish sandwiches.

14. A pickety fence
    a. does a trick that you pick.
    b. gets a lick with a pickety stick.
    c. falls apart because its rickety.

15. What did Jack find at the top of the beanstalk?
    a. A large bean.
    b. A castle and a giant.
    c. A fairy palace.

16. The wolf could not blow down the little Pig's house made of
    a. straw.
    b. bricks.
    c. mud.

17. When the three bears came back from their walk in the woods, they found Goldilocks
    a. sitting in Papa Bear's chair.
    b. eating porridge.
    c. sleeping in Baby Bear's bed.

18. When the youngest Billy Goat Gruff trip-trapped across the bridge, he was stopped by
    a. the police patrol.
    b. the farmer's son.
    c. an ugly old troll.

19. On her way to visit Grandmother, Little Red Riding Hood met
    a. a bear.
    b. a lion.
    c. a wolf.

20. Who awakened Sleeping Beauty from her hundred-year's sleep?
    a. A barking dog.
    b. A crowing rooster.
    c. A handsome young prince.
21. The Tortoise won his race with the Hare because
   a. the Hare took the wrong road.
   b. the Hare took time for a nap.
   c. the Tortoise got help from his friend the horse.

22. What was in the house that Jack built?
   a. Bags of malt.
   b. Three blind mice.
   c. A crooked dog.

23. The dog, the cat, the donkey, and the rooster
   a. traveled to the city to become musicians.
   b. acted in the town circus.
   c. frightened a band of robbers.

24. What did Rumpelstiltskin demand in payment for spinning straw into gold?
   a. The Queen's first-born child.
   b. Half of all he spun.
   c. The golden cat.

25. In the story "Stone Soup" the soldiers tricked the villagers into giving them
   a. shelter for the night.
   b. powder for their weapons.
   c. meat and vegetables.

26. How did the Prince get into the tower to see Rapunzel?
   a. By using a rope.
   b. By climbing up her long hair.
   c. By rubbing a magic stone.

27. At midnight Cinderella's coach changed back into
   a. the red balloon.
   b. a glass slipper.
   c. a yellow pumpkin.

28. Who finally caught the ginger-bread boy and ate him up?
   a. The fox.
   b. The cat.
   c. The wolf.

29. How did Puss-in-Boots trick the king into thinking that his master was very rich?
   a. He obtained the ogre's castle for his master.
   b. He drove his master in a carriage to see the king.
   c. He robbed all the merchants who stopped at the inn.

30. Who saved Thumbelina from having to marry a mole?
   a. A little brown mouse.
   b. A swallow she had befriended.
   c. Her kindly old mother.

31. What did the elves do for the shoemaker and his wife?
   a. Played pranks on them so they could not make shoes.
   b. Made shoes while the shoemaker and his wife slept.
   c. Turned all the shoes to gold.

32. The ugly duckling grew up to be a beautiful
   a. peacock.
   b. pheasant.
   c. swan.

33. When the Fox was not able to get the grapes he wanted, he
   a. called on the crow to get them for him.
   b. tricked the squirrel into throwing them down.
   c. decided they were sour and he did not want them.

34. When the boy cried "Wolf!" for the third time, the townspeople
   a. paid no attention, because he had fooled them before.
   b. went to his help and killed the wolf.
   c. sent his older brother to help him guard the sheep.
PART IV. MODERN STORIES

35. In The Snowy Day Peter
   a. gets lost in the city.
   b. puts a snowball in his pocket.
   c. throws a snowball and breaks a window.

36. Swinny is a
   a. brave little fish.
   b. nickname for a giant whale.
   c. little frog who loves to swim.

37. When Mike Mulligan's steam shovel finished her digging, she was given a new job as
   a. the furnace in the Town Hall.
   b. a trash-collection truck.
   c. a coal car for the railroad.

38. Every time that Pinocchio told a lie
   a. his father spanked him.
   b. his nose grew longer.
   c. he shrunk two inches.

39. Make Way for Ducklings tells about a family of ducks in
   a. a New York pet shop.
   b. the Public Garden in Boston.
   c. the San Diego Zoo.

40. Strega Nona has a
    a. handful of magic beans which she plants.
    b. goose that lays golden eggs and is stolen.
    c. magic pasta pot which floods a town.

41. Frog and toad are
    a. brothers who share a lily pad.
    b. friends who share adventures.
    c. enemies who try to trick each other.

42. Petunia learned that
    a. pigs are smarter than people.
    b. simply having a book does not make one wise.
    c. all animals like to listen to firecrackers.

43. In Millions of Cats a little old man and a little old woman
    a. found a kitten that was the prettiest of all the cats.
    b. took care of millions of cats in their home.
    c. made a million dollars from their cats.

44. The story Little Toot tells about
    a. a tugboat.
    b. a freight engine.
    c. the smallest horn player in the band.

45. The Very Hungry Caterpillar gets sick because it
    a. eats too much food.
    b. plays out in the rain without a coat.
    c. catches a cold during the first snowfall.

46. Curious George is
    a. a little boy.
    b. a zebra.
    c. a monkey.

47. Who roars their terrible roars and grashes their terrible teeth and rolls their terrible eyes and shows their terrible claws?
    a. Three old witches.
    b. Two mean Giants.
    c. The wild things.
48. Winnie-the-Pooh is the story of
  a. a stuffed bear and some of his toy friends.
  b. a pet skunk.
  c. a five-year-old boy and his birthday umbrella.

49. The Little Engine is well known for saying
  a. "Clear-the-track, clear-the-track".
  b. "I-think-I-can, I-think-I-can".
  c. "Look-out-ahead, look-out-ahead".

50. In Caps for Sale
  a. two boys made money by selling hat caps.
  b. monkeys stole some caps.
  c. an old man gave a cap to every boy in the village.

51. Most of the things that Marco saw on Mulberry Street were
  a. in his own back yard.
  b. in the neighbor's garage.
  c. in his imagination.

52. The main character in Horton Hatches the Egg is
  a. an elephant.
  b. a chicken.
  c. a dinosaur.

53. Jumanji is
  a. a haunted mountain.
  b. an evil magician.
  c. a golden city.

54. The Little House became very sad and lonely when
  a. the wind blew off her shutters.
  b. a city grew up around her.
  c. squirrels took over her attic.

55. In Mr. Gumpy's Outing what happens to the animals?
  a. They get lost in the woods.
  b. They fall out of the boat.
  c. They find a magic castle.

56. The trouble with Bartholomew's hat was that
  a. it was the wrong color.
  b. it did not fit.
  c. when he took it off, another one appeared.

57. Madeline is a story about a little girl who lived in
  b. Dallas.

58. What happened to Sylvester when he found a magic pebble?
  a. He wished for all the gold he could carry on his back.
  b. He saw a lion and wished himself into a rock.
  c. He became king of the animals and treated them cruelly.

59. Peter Rabbit disobeyed his mother when he
  a. went into Farmer MacGregor's garden.
  b. teased Flopsy and Mopsy.
  c. did not drink his hot camomile tea.

60. In the Ox-Cart Man a family
  a. moves west to Oklahoma.
  b. owns a stubborn ox.
  c. sells items they have made.

61. In the book Where's Spot, where was Spot hiding?
  a. in the basket.
  b. in the garage under a bench.
  c. in a hollow tree with a mouse family.

62. Rosie the hen
  a. was eaten by a fox.
  b. laid 17 large eggs.
  c. went for a walk.

63. When Alexander has a horrible day he threatens to go to
  a. Australia.
  b. Africa.
  c. hide in the attic.
Appendix C
Sample of Transcript
S. Alright Michael, which two books you think tell about the same kind of idea?

Michael (5:4): ehhhh...

S. You can think about it.

[Pause]

S. You've got to pick two books that tell... are alike, that tell about the same idea. (He points to TITCH and THE CARROT SEED) Can you tell me why?

M. Cause they both grew a plant.

S. Is there anything else?

M. The bike and the no bike. (He points to the picture in TITCH with a bike)

S. Anything else?

M. Nope!

S. Nope. What were they both about?

M. Do you know what a clue is?

S. A clue? What's a clue?

M. No you have to guess. I do.

S. I don't know. What's a clue?

M. You have to guess. If you guess and the clue is... you have to say part of it.

S. You want me to give me you a clue?

M. Yes.

S. Hmm.. you want me to give you a clue? Ok I want you to look at this book right here and tell me what that book was about. That's your clue. In a few w...  

M. No you have to say the name of a part of it.

S. Ok. You tell me about Titch.

M. She grew a plant and she had two big brothers and they had to need big things and the girl had to have little things. Big brothers and they had big things and her had little things. The big kids have the big things.

S. What else...

M. Nothing!

S. Nothing else?

M. Nope!
Appendix D
Samples of Themes for Matched Book Titles
Because they both had things that were growing
Things grow.
Titch got left out.
Titch was little.............It grew bigger than them.
Share whatever you're doing.
They work together.
Big brothers big things. Little one little things.
Instruments can break.

Bigger is better.
Some bad thing was after them.
They almost don't get where they want to be.

Wolves are dangerous and so are foxes and they will eat you.
Not to trust strangers that you don't know.
Stay away from wolves.
Eating up stuff-gobbling them up.
They both got eaten up.
Build your house strong.

Can't always have things your way.
Don't be mean to your friends.
Friends split up and then get back together.
If you get mad always apologize soon enough and then you get to be friends.
### TATTERCOATS vs. SNOWWHITE

Somebody hated them.
Both got married to a prince.
Two people being mean to another person.
They were dressed in rags and they both married a prince and they both had great beauty and someone didn't like her.

### FOURTH GRADE

#### STEVIE vs. THY FRIEND, OBADIAH

You should be nice to your friends that are loyal to you.
Even a nuisance can turn out to be ok.
The people that got bugged didn't like the buggies at first, but when the buggies left, the people who were being bugged got worried or sad.

### DAWN vs. A JAPANESE FAIRY TALE

Gave away something so that someone else could have it.
In both stories the character that brought out meaning in the story had to give up something very rare to them.
The bird sacrificed his feathers. The guy sacrificed his looks.

### DAWN vs. THE STONECUTTER

They wanted something better for themselves and ended up with less than they had before.
The more you're greedy the more you can lose.
Foreign countries/both had boats.
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