Layered Reading Through Literary Narrative Structures

by

Christine A. Portier

A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
Graduate Department of Curriculum, Teaching and Learning
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education
University of Toronto

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Department of Curriculum, Teaching and Learning
University of Toronto

Abstract

My research investigated how teachers could develop students’ literary framework, and build on their experience of fiction by studying what is typical and enduring about reading. I outline an original narrative framework that was brought to bear on the study of literature and was easily and readily taught to primary students. This approach analyzes stories by means of the fictional literary codes (or narrative structures) we use to organize stories and convey meaning. To ensure that this approach was of practical use to educators, I conducted a formative experiment to address the following questions: 1) How do elementary students’ interact with and respond to stories by means of these literary structures? 2) How can teachers work with children to analyze how a story is coded to convey meaning? I collaborated with five primary teachers to first analyze stories by means of their literary narrative structures and then to develop questions to be used to guide instruction and classroom reading discussions and interactions. The teachers and I planned instructional strategies and put these into action. Approximately once a week for the entire school year, I visited the grade 1 and 2 teachers and their students during their language instruction periods and then reflected on my observations with the teachers. To analyze how these students engaged with and responded to stories, I gathered qualitative data through observations, interviews and student writing samples. Results show that by using the literary structural framework, grade 1 and 2 students engaged in critical text
analyses, demonstrated a deep comprehension of stories, transferred the structural framework to understand new texts, contributed meaningfully in dialogues about literature, related the content of stories to their structures, and engaged in processes associated with scientific and creative thinking. The conceptual narrative framework of this research was shown to be an effective way to deepen students literary comprehension and develop critical relational thinking.
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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST of TABLES .................................................................................................................... ix
LIST of FIGURES .................................................................................................................. x
LIST of APPENDICES ........................................................................................................... xii

1. INTRODUCTION ...................................................................................................................... 1
   1.1 Rationale .......................................................................................................................... 2
   1.2 Research Goals and Questions ....................................................................................... 3
   1.3 Theoretical Framework .................................................................................................. 3
      1.3.1 Literature and Society ............................................................................................. 3
      1.3.2 Literature and the Individual .................................................................................. 5
      1.3.3 Literature and Concept Development ..................................................................... 6

2. SYNTHESIS OF THE LITERATURE ...................................................................................... 8
   2.1 Reading Comprehension Theories .................................................................................. 8
      2.1.1 Defining Comprehension ....................................................................................... 8
   2.2 Comprehension Strategies ............................................................................................. 9
   2.3 Text Associations ........................................................................................................... 11
      2.3.1 External Text Associations .................................................................................... 11
      2.3.2 Internal Text Associations .................................................................................... 12
   2.4 Instruction Focusing on Narrative Structures ............................................................... 14
   2.5 Semiotics and Structures ............................................................................................. 16
   2.6 Structures and Literary Theory ........................................................................................ 17
   2.7 A New Conceptual Literary (Narrative) Framework ..................................................... 20
      2.7.1 Narrative Functions ............................................................................................... 20
      2.7.2 Plot Categories ....................................................................................................... 23
      2.7.3 Summary of the Literary Framework ..................................................................... 25
      2.7.4 Definition of Terms  .............................................................................................. 25

3. DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY .......................................................................................... 29
   3.1 Research Goals .............................................................................................................. 29
   3.2 Research Design ............................................................................................................ 29
   3.3 Formative Experiments .................................................................................................. 30
      3.3.1 Theoretical Framework .......................................................................................... 30
      3.3.2 Interventionist and Goal Oriented .......................................................................... 31
      3.3.3 Iterative .................................................................................................................. 31
      3.3.4 Transformational .................................................................................................... 32
      3.3.5 Pragmatic .............................................................................................................. 32
   3.4 Research Site and Participants ...................................................................................... 33
      3.4.1 Research Site .......................................................................................................... 33
      3.4.2 Teacher Participants .............................................................................................. 33
      3.4.3 Student Participants .............................................................................................. 35
   3.5 Research Questions ......................................................................................................... 36
   3.6 Research Process .......................................................................................................... 37
      3.6.1 Planning .................................................................................................................. 37
# LIST OF TABLES

Table 1  Basic Definitions of Literary Framework Concepts ........................................... 28  
Table 2  Background Information about Teacher-Participants ........................................ 35  
Table 3  Ethnic Background of Students ............................................................... 35  
Table 4  Observations in Teachers’ Classrooms ......................................................... 40  
Table 5  How Sources of Data Relate to the Research Questions .......................... 43  
Table 6  Data Was Organized Chronologically and by Story Focus .............................. 46  
Table 7  Different Structural Forms in Grade 1 Students’ Billy Goat Variations ............... 56  
Table 8  Grade 2 Students Predicted the Ending of ‘The Maestro’ ......................... 94  
Table 9  Students Displaced a Story’s Setting ......................................................... 95  
Table 10  How the Grade 1 Students Metaphorically Categorized The Three Billy Goats Gruff Events ............................................................................................... 124  
Table 11  Differences Between How the Grade 1 and Grade 2 Students Plotted Events .... 129  
Table 12  Grade 2 Students Related Setting, Action and Characters in a Story .............. 130
## LIST OF FIGURES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Figure 1</td>
<td>Literary framework used in this research</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 2</td>
<td>How the hero, villain and want functions relate to one another</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 3</td>
<td>A grade 1 student’s template for his variation of <em>The Three Billy Goats Gruff</em> story</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 4</td>
<td>A student’s plan for his <em>Billy Goats</em> story variation</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 5</td>
<td>Ariana’s prediction of how an eagle might help Thomas</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 6</td>
<td>Nadia’s illustration predicts how various characters might function as helpers</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 7</td>
<td>Kyan related the heroes in two stories</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 8</td>
<td>Ariana compared events from two stories</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 9</td>
<td>Kadeen related very different events from two stories</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 10</td>
<td>Ariana wrote and illustrated how two structurally similar events differed significantly in form</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 11</td>
<td>A grade 1 student indicated the internal change of the hero</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 12</td>
<td>The horse will not let the dragon slayer leave</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 13</td>
<td>A grade 1 student moved the hero and villain cards together to overlap</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 14</td>
<td>Grade 2 students saw similarities across three stories</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 15</td>
<td>A sample of a grade 2 group’s Venn diagram comparing a book to a movie</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 16</td>
<td>The front and back cover of <em>Mufaro’s Beautiful Daughters</em> (Steptoe, 1987)</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 17</td>
<td>Maysun used the function cards to show her thinking</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 18</td>
<td>The remaining narrative function cards show Maysun’s thinking process</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 19</td>
<td>A grade 1 student arranged the function cards to show their relationship to one another in an OCTM plot</td>
<td>104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 20</td>
<td>Than drew this image to show the two sides of the dragon slayer’s heart</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 21</td>
<td>The grade 1 students identified the hero, villain and lack functions related within one character</td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 22</td>
<td>Anh overlapped the hero and villain card above an image of Yoshiko</td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 23</td>
<td>Anh moved the villain card away from the hero</td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 24</td>
<td>One of the final images from <em>Dragon Slayer</em> (Kuczera, 2004)</td>
<td>112</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 25</td>
<td>Devon’s plot line clearly shows a weather/time pattern</td>
<td>114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 26</td>
<td>A close look at two images from the plot line of Alex’s displaced story</td>
<td>114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 27</td>
<td>The hero rides through the desert in <em>Dragon Slayer</em> (Kuczera, 2004)</td>
<td>116</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 28</td>
<td>In <em>Dragon Slayer</em> (Kuczera, 2004), the desert setting resembled the hero’s armor</td>
<td>117</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 29</td>
<td>The hero rode through a tunnel and entered the dragon’s lair</td>
<td>118</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 30</td>
<td>Three students’ villains, created in relation to settings</td>
<td>123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 31</td>
<td>The grade 1 students’ plot line for <em>The Three Billy Goats Gruff</em></td>
<td>124</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 32</td>
<td>The grade 1 students’ plot line for <em>The Boy and the Giants</em> (Moodie, 1993)</td>
<td>125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 33</td>
<td>The grade 1 plot line for <em>Anna and the Seven Swans</em> (Silverman, 1984)</td>
<td>126</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 34</td>
<td>The grade 2 plot line for <em>The Boy and the Giants</em> (Moodie, 1993)</td>
<td>128</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 35</td>
<td>The grade 2 students plotted the same events from two perspectives</td>
<td>132</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 36  Safia illustrated a story event ................................................................. 134
Figure 37  Safia drew Thomas on the back of the fish and Anna and Ivan hiding in
the apple tree ............................................................................................................. 135
Figure 38  The inferred thoughts of the dragon slayer (hero) and horse (helper) ........... 147
LIST OF APPENDICES

Appendix A  Background Survey of Teacher-Participants .................................................. 212
Appendix B  Stories Read During the Collaborative Teacher-Inquiry Meetings .......... 213
Appendix C  Categories Shaping Classroom Observations ................................................. 214
Appendix D  End of Project Interview with Teachers (Semi-structured) ......................... 215
Appendix E  Details and Examples from Data Analysis ..................................................... 216
Appendix F  A Grade 2 Student’s Displaced Version of Qalupalik (Papatsie, 2010) .... 218
Appendix G  Events Plotted on an Interactive Board ....................................................... 219
Appendix H  Poetry Template to Explore the Contrasting Aspects of Water ................. 220
Appendix I  Sequence of Narrative Structures Introduced By Each Teacher ............... 221
Appendix J  Some Stories Read in the Grade 1 And 2 Classrooms ............................... 222
Appendix K  Lydia’ Questions and Planning for Student Discussions ......................... 224
Appendix L  Examples of Relational Thinking Processes Used by the Students .......... 225
Appendix M  Some Reading and Comprehension Strategies Embedded into the Structural Approach .................................................. 226
Layered Reading Through Literary Narrative Structures

For children to achieve a deep understanding of what they read, they need to develop critical and creative thinking skills. An emphasis on such higher order thinking is reflected in Canada’s provincial curricula (e.g., Ontario Ministry of Education, 2006), American policies (Lehman, 2009) and in the Program for International Student Assessments (The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2003). Understanding the complex textual relationships and the significance of what is read is essential for children to realize the full meaning of a text. My research addresses a way to frame language instruction so that children move toward a deep comprehension of what they read through the development of relational thinking processes.

Reading comprehension research has examined the influential factors that either originate within a child (e.g., background knowledge) or lie outside of the child (e.g., text features). Instructional approaches tend to highlight one of these factors. For example, to facilitate thinking about stories, elementary children may be asked to listen to or read a story and then respond by connecting it to their content background knowledge. With this instructional approach, however, a child’s responses may not always be relevant to an understanding of the text (e.g., Beck & McKeown, 2001; Paris & Paris, 2007). For educators, a focus on background content knowledge has inherent inequities, for it is not possible for every child to bring to school the relevant content knowledge for every story, nor is it possible for teachers to provide their students with the content knowledge for every story. In contrast, other approaches ask students to draw connections between parts of a story (e.g., Mandler & Johnson, 1977; Zahoor & Janjua, 2013) or the ideas within it (e.g., McKeown, Beck & Blake, 2009b). While these approaches encourage some higher order thinking, important text ‘ideas’ can be left disconnected from the structure and the story disconnected from its context within literature.

It may be possible to implement a conceptual framework of literary structures into classroom instruction, which students can bring to each story they read. In this dissertation I outline a conceptual framework that can be brought to bear on the study of literature and has the potential to be easily and readily taught to elementary students. I investigated how
teachers can implement this framework with the intent to build on children’s experience of fiction and narrative by studying what is typical and enduring about reading. My hypothesis was that if children study the structures of fictional narratives, investigating text relations by means of the story’s organizing constituents, then they will understand in greater depth the texts they are reading, transfer ideas to new texts that they experience, and engage in critical thinking processes. This will have an impact not only on their experience of individual stories but also on their study of literature (and language) as a whole. My study operationalized an original literary framework\(^1\) (fictional narrative structures) and I investigated ways in which teachers can organize literary instruction and classroom interactions around these literary structures, and how this may help develop children’s critical reading abilities.

\subsection*{1.1 Rationale}

In a meta-analysis of literacy instruction research, Moats (2009) found support for what seems to be a common sense notion: the more a teacher knows about the subject being taught, the more children will learn and achieve. Although elementary teachers are considered to be generalists, both experienced and new teachers often feel they need more content knowledge (Kosnik & Beck, 2009; Moats, 2009). Underlying my research is the assumption that understanding stories and teaching literature is important. For as long as we have had language, we have told stories. In more recent history, we participate in stories by watching movies, creating videos and even by assuming alternate identities and transporting ourselves into digital worlds (Green, 2004). My research builds upon the assumptions that it is important to study a system that is fundamental to human society and that a study of literature may be vital to a child’s social and individual development. Stories are a primary social means of communication, and literature is one of the highest forms of individual creative expression. An analysis of narrative and fictional structures may also involve seeing how stories are organized relationally, conceptually, metaphorically and functionally, all of which are fundamental cognitive processes.

\footnote{This framework is outlined in chapter 3.}
1.2 Research Goals and Questions

I am interested in the relationship between literary codes (structures) and critical thinking. Analyzing how a story is coded to convey meaning may serve to develop a fuller understanding of stories by engaging students in the processes of critical thinking. The goal of my research was to investigate how teachers could develop a student’s literary framework, building on their experience of fiction by studying what is typical and enduring about reading: literary structures. The research questions were: 1) How do elementary students’ understanding of stories develop as they interact with and respond to stories by means of literary structures? 2) How can teachers work with children to analyze how a story is coded to convey meaning? To answer these questions, I collaborated with five elementary teachers, first to analyze stories by means of their literary structures and then to develop critical reading practices (e.g. questions and activities) around these structures. In two of the teachers’ classrooms, I gathered data to analyze how the teachers and students engaged with and responded to stories.

1.3 Theoretical Framework

1.3.1 Literature and Society. A child is born into a world of stories and by the time she arrives at school, she already knows many of the literary and linguistic aspects of language—albeit unconsciously. Bruner (1996) stated it this way: “We live in a sea of stories, and like the fish who (according to the proverb) will be the last to discover water, we have our own difficulties grasping what it is like to swim in stories” (p. 147). In Sapir’s (1963) writings about linguistics and social behaviour, he concluded that a culture’s way of life is structured in the same way as its language. Language shapes how societies understand the ‘sensible’ world, and in turn, what concerns a society is transmitted through language and encoded into its literature. However different cultures may be from one another, there are common concerns and common structures to their myths and languages. For if not, the “forms of culture and imagination outside our own traditions would not be intelligible to us” (Frye, 1982, p. 13). Indeed, we would not be able to translate languages or stories without some commonality among the structures. Narrative is one structure that we share.
Narrative is present in myth, legend, fable, tale, novella, epic, history, tragedy, drama, comedy, mime, painting … stained-glass windows, cinema, comics, news items, conversation. Moreover, under this almost infinite diversity of forms, narrative is present in every age, in every place, in every society; it begins with the very history of mankind and there nowhere is nor has been a people without narrative. … Caring nothing for the division between good and bad literature, narrative is international, transhistorical, transcultural: it is simply there, like life itself (Barthes, 1977, p. 65).

A fundamental aim of literary instruction is to bring the child to recognize what he already ‘potentially’ knows by helping to “create the structure of the subject in the child’s mind” (Frye, 1988, p. 13). Bruner (1996) noted that although narrative structures may be universal, they can only be realized in particulars. This suggests two very important ideas: an individual’s particular and personal thoughts finds expression through universal structures and, universal structures may by seen in the particular expressions of the individual. Thus educators may be able to teach children about ‘story’ through the individual stories they read. This has important educational implications. It is not possible to teach a child every story ever told but it may be possible to teach about all stories through the individual stories a child experiences. Story variations, including our many cultural variations, are given shape by the underlying structures. Comprehension of literary narrative structures (the structures of fiction) can be transferred from one reading situation to another, from one form of narrative to another, and the content understood by way of these structures.

Bruner (1963) first addressed concerns about transference and content in *The Process of Education*. He felt that the notion of idea transfer, not skill transfer, was the heart of education. Once a child learns an idea he or she can use it later as the foundation for understanding future problems. The underlying fundamental structures of a subject may be the ideas that can be transferred. These structures make a subject more comprehensible to the student, and, just as importantly, as a student learns new information she will have a schema from which to consider that new information (Skemp, 2006).

The structures of stories remain constant, so they can be taught to students in kindergarten and throughout the grades with ever progressing complexity (Bruner, 1963). It
is the structures (ideas), not the content, that moves with the student. The content can then be taught in relation to the structures (Frye, 1988). An emphasis on structure unburdens children from an endless memorization of facts. “Education in reading comprehension should be about increasing patterns that students can use, recognize, and communicate to gain new knowledge and ideas” (Caine, 2008, p. 130). Structural patterns can be transferred, providing a schema to frame new experiences. This makes ideas, including literary ideas, not only foundational but relational and transformational as well. As students return to these ideas, they develop an enduring understanding that can be expanded upon to construct new ideas and move beyond. A literary framework can in turn be applied to other contexts. It may become a way for students to critically approach the different perspectives and social issues within their immediate community, the larger community and the world.

To study literature is to study society. Society encodes its concerns in literature and because of the historical aspect, society in turn is shaped by its literature. Studying literary structures involves drawing relations and by this means children may also come to understand the world we live in and the people we live with. For example, on one level of narrative we have heroes in search of desired objects. At a deeper level of narrative, a story is presenting the reader with vision of a world that is desired (Frye, 1957). Stories intimately weave human needs into the relations between the characters, their actions and the setting. To approach literature critically is to begin to see how all elements in literature are related to all other elements to form the unified whole, which presents us with visions of a world we want, or a world from which we want to be set free.

1.3.2 Literature and the Individual. Vygotsky (1986) meticulously demonstrated that language and literature are essential to the cognitive development of a child. As a child is born into a world of language, “the true direction of the development of thinking is not from the individual to the social, but from the social to the individual” (p. 36). A child’s first reading of a story should always be experiential. Rosenblatt (1978) emphasizes the importance of an “aesthetic” reading of literature, where the reader focuses on to what happens—his or her lived experience—during the reading. Indeed, Frye comments that, “if we are responding to someone else’s poem, we should respond to it at first with intelligence
and feeling, as we do anything else outside ourselves” (p. 115). It is after this experiential reading that we “come up against the question of how our own powers of creation can be related to what the poet has made” (p. 115). As educators, we want to build upon a child’s experiences. A study into how stories convey meaning may serve to enhance what a story means (personally) to the child.

The study of literature requires a child to take in a story as a whole, then differentiate its parts through their functions and relations, and finally move back to a unified whole. This whole-part movement aligns with Vygotsky’s theory of how words and thought relate. When learning to speak, a child moves from individual words to coherent connected sentences—from part to whole. However, as a child learns meaning (thoughts), he progresses from whole complexes to the differentiated particular meanings of words—from whole to part. This aligns with how a story is organized. For example, a particular story may be structured as a comedy. Yet a story can only be considered a comedy by the relations of its parts, primarily, of the hero obtaining what is desired.

According to Vygotsky (1986), thought and word relate in a back and forth movement, from word to thought and thought to word. Thought comes into existence, finding reality and form, through words. Literature, being an organization of words, is an expression of one of the highest levels of human thought and human development. It is at once individual and social. Human experiences with literature is at first completely social as stories are a form of communication that is structured to be understood by others. Yet each story is an imaginative vision from an individual’s thoughts, realized through a communicable structure. The study of literary structures, as one aspect of language, may be vital to a child’s development, for stories are a primary social means of communication, stories provide concepts by which a child’s cognition develops, and literature is a highly creative (imaginative) form of individual expression.

1.3.3 Literature and Concept Development. Concepts are “an active part of the intellectual process, constantly engaged in serving communication, understanding, and problem solving” (Vygotsky, 1986, p. 98). Vygotsky referred to two kinds of formations that lead to highly developed conceptual thinking: scientific and spontaneous concepts.
Spontaneous concepts develop from a child’s own reflections and experiences and move from the particular phenomena upward (higher order thinking) toward structured generalizations. Scientific concepts begin as highly structured generalizations that are only fully grasped when they can be related to specific concrete phenomena. The development of these two kinds of formations influence each other. As a child’s level of spontaneous conceptual thinking develops, scientific concepts, presented through instruction, are able to work their way toward concrete understanding. In contrast, the understanding of scientific concepts provide the structures for the upward movement of the child’s spontaneous conceptual thinking. This means higher level conceptual thinking depends upon instruction.

Hardy (1977) argued that narrative is how we think and she explains her interest in “…the qualities which fictional narrative shares with that inner and outer storytelling that plays a major role in our sleeping and waking lives. For we dream in narrative, daydream in narrative, remember, anticipate, hope, despair, believe, doubt, plan, revise, criticize, construct, gossip, learn, hate, and love by narrative. In order really to live, we make up stories …” (p. 12). Bruner (1986) refers to a “narrative mode” of the mind that makes meaning of our experiences and produces acts of imagination. A study of literature through literary narrative concepts aligns not only with thinking processes but may help promote the development of children’s higher order thinking. The structures of literature are concepts that children will slowly comprehend as their experience with stories grows. From the study of stories, children can also expand their understanding of these concepts and begin to consciously use them to frame their experiences, form new relationships, and develop new ideas.
2. Synthesis of the Literature

What does educational research have to say about developing children’s higher order thinking abilities? What effect has this had on classroom teaching practices?

2.1 Reading Comprehension Theories

A significant amount of research has been conducted into higher order thinking and how children can come to analyze and engage meaningfully in the stories they read. However, the many different terms used in research suggest that comprehension is not yet fully comprehended: critical thinking, critical literacy, higher order thinking, high level thinking, deep thinking and meaning construction, to name a few. Despite the differences in focus and the different terms used, the general aim of reading comprehension research is to help move children toward thinking more ‘deeply’ about a text. Reading comprehension theories have considered different facets of comprehension: some focus on content (Kintsch & van Dijk, 1978), others emphasize cognitive strategies (Pressley et al., 1992), some investigate schemas (Rumelhart, 1984), while others investigate how meaning is built between words and sentences (Graesser & Bertus, 1998). It is clear though, that as children learn to read words—the phonology, morphology and syntax of words—they should also be learning to think about and comprehend what they read.

2.1.1 Defining comprehension. Discussions about 21st century education frequently turn toward ways to develop “deeper subject-matter understanding” (Scardamalia, 2001, p. 174) and critical thinking skills. Comprehension is not considered to be a passive activity whereby a child reads and ‘receives’ the meaning of what is read. Comprehension is being defined by active cognitive processes (Graesser & Clark, 1985; Frye, 1988; Pearson & Johnson, 2013) “during which meaning is constructed through interactions between text and reader” (Harris & Hodges, 1995). Caccamise, Snyder and Kintsch (2008) provided a useful contrast between what they see as the difference between deep and shallow comprehension. Deep comprehension is a lasting and unified comprehension that involves constructive activity from the reader, using inferential and relational skills to develop new knowledge from what the reader already knows. This definition is further understood by looking at its contrast: shallow comprehension is a superficial, temporary and fragmented understanding,
primarily a passive and reproductive activity. Pearson and Johnson (2013) looked at how the mind draws relations between old and new concepts, and summarized the ‘essence’ of comprehension as “building bridges between the new and the known” (p. 24).

### 2.2 Comprehension Strategies

To promote deep reading comprehension, many strategies have been researched and implemented in classrooms, ranging from attempts to directly teach children to use specific cognitive strategies, to efforts to help children make content associations to a text, to encouraging children to draw connections between the parts of a text. Cognitive strategies are implemented in classrooms to encourage children to think deeply as they are reading. With a strategies approach, children are directly taught to think about and actively use specific cognitive strategies when they engage with a text (Stahl, 2004; Dole, Nokes, & Drits, 2009; McKeown, Beck & Blake, 2009b). The long list of strategies includes predicting and clarifying while reading (Myers, 2005); forming mental images of the text while reading (Pressley, 1976); reflecting on the text before, during and after reading (Graves & Graves, 2003); monitoring the accuracy of the meanings developed while reading; categorization; drawing inferences; figuring out main ideas; summarizing and drawing conclusions; and evaluating or synthesizing information.

Current research has shown that only a small repertoire of these strategies may effectively promote comprehension (Pressley, 2008). Block and Duffy (2008) examined the research on comprehension strategies, published between 1978 and 2000, and found that of the 45 different strategies that were part of classroom instruction, only nine of these were validated as effectively facilitating comprehension. The American National Reading Panel Report (National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, 2000) listed seven strategies they found to be strongly supported by evidence for text comprehension improvement. When Stahl (2004) limited her research review to strategy instruction in K-2 classrooms, she found teachers were using a wide range of strategies in their classrooms, some supported by research and some lacking research. Further, many other strategies were supported by research but not widely used in classrooms. Although research abounds about cognitive strategy instruction, outcomes and effectiveness vary according to the specific
strategy, the fit of the strategy to content, the teachers learning how to use the strategy, and how the strategies were taught to students (Dole, Nokes & Drits, 2009).

An appealing aspect about strategies-based instruction is the idea that the skills being learned can potentially be transferred, so that, “what changes from grade to grade is not the strategies to be taught but the text in which strategies are applied” (Block & Duffy, 2008, p. 29). Regardless of what text is being read or what grade a child is in, children can be guided, year after year, through the same comprehension strategies. A strategies-approach attempts to provide students with something that transfers from text to text.

However, concerns arise from a strategy-based approach to instruction. Perhaps methods of comprehending a text should be connected to the way the text was written. Comprehension strategies may be more effective if they relate to the way stories have been structured (coded) to convey meaning. Another concern centers on the subject of study. If strategies increasingly become the focus of instruction, they may replace the curriculum subject. The proponents of strategies approaches show a great interest in promoting high-level discussions and relating comprehension to cognition, yet there is little reference to the study of literature as a whole. McKeown, Beck & Blake (2009b) trace the origins of cognitive strategies instruction to developmental psychology, general learning tasks and models of thinking. These strategies were later refined for specific application by teachers when reading with children. Clarity is still lacking about which strategy to use, how to teach it, and how to use it when reading (McKeown, Beck & Blake, 2009b). One of Stahl’s (2004) suggestions was to begin relating strategies to texts, in that, “comprehension strategies should be matched to their usefulness in making meaning and remembering the text” (p. 606). For example, identifying main ideas could be matched to nonfictional (informational) texts or story mapping paired with narrative texts. The National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (2000) report found some evidence that teaching comprehension strategies in the context of academic subjects was effective, although they suggested more information is needed.

In my research, stories are seen in context of a larger body of knowledge, literature, which is organized and can be taught progressively. Certain strategies may be a means by
which children can develop their understanding of fiction and narrative, but my research assumes they need to be related to how a story is organized or coded for meaning.

2.3 Text Associations

Readers have problems understanding what they read when the associations they make are irrelevant to the text (Gernsbacher & Faust, 1991). Some classroom studies have indicated that the reading responses of elementary children often remain at a superficial level or fragmented (Beck & McKeown, 2001), fail to go beyond personal reactions (Sloan, 2008), diverge from the ideas within the text (Pressley, 2000; Beck & McKeown, 2001), or in other cases, rely inappropriately and excessively on prior knowledge, neglecting the given textual information (Paris & Paris, 2007). Students show greater comprehension of a text when they are taught to generate relevant associations (Linden & Wittrock, 1981; Pressley, 1998). For example, educators have drawn relationships between the students’ content knowledge of the text and the new information they are learning from the text, or they have reorganized the content hierarchically to show the relations between the ideas within a text (Kintsch & Kintsch, 1996, 2005). The former is an example of making external associations and the latter making internal associations.

2.3.1 External text associations. For both fiction and nonfiction texts, children are encouraged to connect to the content of the text. For example, in a nonfiction text about wolves, students might be encouraged to draw on what they already know about wolves and apply this to the new information in their reading. These kinds of associations become problematic when applied to non-informational texts. Nonfiction may concern itself with what is being said (the content), yet fiction concerns itself with how something is being said. The content of fiction is not organized or used the same way as that of nonfiction and the content is not comprehended in the same way. A nonfiction text may expand upon descriptions of objects that are outside of the text, but this external reference is not the focus of fiction. “The “sense” of a story as a whole may alter the reference and even the referentiality of its component parts. For a story’s components, insofar as they become its

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2 Although we often read nonfiction to learn about the content of the text, it is nevertheless an organization of words that is structured in particular ways to convey meaning. The content is understood by way of the structures. Nonfiction is frequently structured as a narrative and thus shares many of the structures of fictional narrative that I explore in this research. However, this discussion is beyond the scope of this paper.
“functions” or captives, lose their status as singular and definite referring expressions” (Bruner, 1991, no page). In other words, a story might make use of wolf; yet to understand the story wolf requires references within the text. This wolf has been given a functional role, and possibly symbolic and metaphorical meanings that rely on the other components of the story, and its relation within a body of stories.

The content of stories cannot be directly related, one-to-one, to ‘real’ or sensory world content. This presents a problem for educators who are trying to help children relate their background knowledge to the stories they are reading. For example, children have often been encouraged to relate their personal experiences to the content of a story (Au, 1979), yet it is not possible for every student to arrive at school with the relevant content knowledge for every story, nor is it possible for teachers to provide students with the content knowledge for every story. What do children need to know when reading a story? Will content knowledge help children understand the next story that they read? Essentially any image or object can and does find its way into stories, so stories must be something other than an association to external objects. Furthermore, a look across literature will reveal many recurring images. For example, trees show up quite often in stories, both dead trees and living trees. What is their significance? Should children know something about these images to understand a story? And if so, what? The content of literature and the content of nonfiction cannot be treated in the same way. For some of the above reasons, current research on comprehension, specifically the comprehension of fiction, stresses the importance of internal text associations.

2.3.2 Internal text associations. To comprehend fiction, the relationships between the parts of a story need to be identified and understood. More often than not, these relations are not explicitly stated and must be inferred: a high level of skill found to be important to comprehension (Duke, Pressley & Hilden, 2004; Kintsch & Kintsch, 2005; van den Broek et al., 2005; Van Kleeck, 2008). Research has investigated the relationship between ideas within a story and the relationships between the structures of a story.

Upon initial observation of grade 1 teachers reading picture books aloud to students, Beck and McKeown (2001) noted that students frequently used the images to construct
meaning instead of attending to the “linguistic content” of the story. They found that in order for children to construct meaning from texts, teachers need to encourage them to focus and reflect on the important ideas in stories and engage in ‘analytical’ talk. This could be done through the development of questions that allow for text ideas to be connected. They helped students focus on the language relations within the story rather than forming external associations between the story content and the content of their everyday lives (e.g., if a story was about a dog, they would encourage the children to attend to the details and relations about the dog as told through the words of the story). With this help, grade 1 children began relating story ideas and attended to the content within the story.

A few years later, in a two-year study with grade 5 students, McKeown, Beck & Blake (2009a, 2009b) compared their story-ideas approach with a strategies approach and a basal reader control group. The story-ideas group outperformed the strategies group in some comprehension measures, such as narrative recall and expository learning assessment.

From the above two studies, two important ideas emerged. First, by relating important ideas within a text, even very young children can deepen their understanding. Educators can develop questions to help students focus on story ideas and foster critical, reflective and inferential thinking about these ideas through internal text associations. A second important idea was that the chosen stories for reading need to have some complexity of events and ideas. Texts that present simplified unrelated situations were not sufficient for developing relations (e.g., The hat was red. The bird was red. The red ball bounced). Children cannot be encouraged to relate story ideas if there are no complex ideas to relate. For example, this can happen when a text is not a complete story or does not follow an event structure. Even when a text is well above a child’s independent reading level, she can still think about the complexity of ideas that are heard or viewed.

However, teachers do not always easily recognize which ideas are ‘important’ in a story. My research questions the important story ideas found in stories. Will different teachers recognize the same ideas as important in a text? Can the same story ideas be found across stories? If students are able to relate some ideas in one story, have they developed a skill that might transfer, or an understanding that might endure, to help them comprehend another
story? When McKeown, Beck & Blake (2009b) gave students new stories to comprehend, they found only a modest transfer effect. Yet transferring skills from one learning situation to another is of fundamental importance to a child’s learning.

2.4 Instruction Focusing on Narrative Structures.

Children are usually introduced to stories earlier than to other forms of texts and thus they tend to show a knowledge of narrative structures before other text structures (Grabe, 2002; Tolchinsky, Johansson & Zamora, 2002). Thompson (2008) suggested that children in primary grades may have a ‘framework’ for understanding stories simply from repeated exposure, but it may not be sufficient to handle the complex texts they will encounter later. Much earlier than the above research was conducted, Bruner (1996) had commented that “it has always been tacitly assumed that narrative skill comes ‘naturally,’ that it does not have to be taught. But a closer look shows this not to be true at all” (p. 40). Many researchers have agreed and made attempts made to explicitly instruct children in story structures. Story grammar models have been implemented in education by Rumelhart (1975), Mandler & Johnson (1977), and Stein & Glenn (1979). These grammars vary somewhat but tend to include constituents focusing on an initiating event, a reaction to the initiating event, a goal, an attempt at the goal, and the final resolution. Story grammars have helped teachers enhance students’ interactions with stories (Schmitt & O’Brien, 1986), and even young grade 1 students have been taught to analyze ‘episodes’ and structures (Calfee & Patrick, 1985).

Some recent research has begun to focus on the explicit instruction of narrative structures and how this affects students’ reading comprehension. When a child draws relationships between the different parts of a story, he must make inferences, and thus becomes engaged in higher order or critical thinking (van den Broek et al., 2005). Some classroom-based studies found that if students are explicitly taught narrative structures, their reading comprehension improves (Pearson & Hamm, 2005; Stevens et al., 2010). Dymock (2007) found that students who understand narrative structure show better narrative comprehension, yet also suggested that students need to be taught more than just beginning, middle and end. Beginning in grade 1, students need to know more elaborate structures, such
as setting, characters, plot and theme, so they have a foundation for more complex stories encountered later on.

Even parents, when reading with their children, have been found to often unconsciously refer to and ask their children questions that relate to the structures of stories (Hayes, 2007). Van Kleeck (2008) concluded that important literal and inferential questions could be developed to enhance children’s story comprehension and that these questions could be connected to the story grammar, specifically its causal structure. Both Hayes and Van Kleeck broke down the story Mooncake (Asch, 1999) into its story grammar. Hayes showed which aspects of the grammar were referred to by parents reading to children, and Van Kleeck scripted literal and inferential questions that educators could ask with each story element. Van Kleeck found that many of the story questions they developed could be related to the story’s grammar, which they defined using Stein & Glenn’s (1979) model. The model outline the following six grammatical units:

- Setting - time, place and character
- Initiating Event - sets the action of the story
- Internal Response - reaction to the initiating event
- Attempt - effort to solve the problem
- Consequence - the result of the character’s effort to solve the problem
- Reaction - response to the consequence

This model and its variations are typically used in elementary and secondary instruction. Variations often refer to the beginning, middle, end, with the addition of characters, problems and events.

Van Kleeck found that many of the Mooncake ideas were difficult to ‘fit’ with the above grammar model and so she also developed questions for the aspects of the story, which she felt were not connected to its grammatical parts. However, I would suggest that the above grammar model and other similar models are not sufficiently developed to account for all the elements in fictional narratives. Nor is the above model flexible enough to analyze the complex relationships between characters, actions, settings and images that even the simplest stories often contain. And although children may be able to answer questions that focus on
the story content within the elements outlined in the above grammar model, the model itself seems difficult for children to learn. This would hinder their ability and desire to apply and interact with it to construct meaning from the stories they are reading.

Zahoor and Janjua (2013) implemented a story grammar model (Mandler & Johnson, 1977) with older students and found it aided comprehension by “unfolding the whole text into manageable functional units sketched along a coherent meaningful structure” (p. 617). Unfortunately, the tree diagram that they sketched with the students, based on the story grammar model, was complicated and spanned several pages. This process would be difficult for elementary students to follow. Interestingly, Zahoor and Janjua also concluded that the “figurative elements” in the story were not separate from the structure but instead enhanced or elaborated on the structural constituents.

My research extends from research on narrative structures and attempts to go beyond a story grammar model or a single strategy for narrative reading. The narrative framework that I implemented was intended to provide a way into all aspects of a narrative through an alignment of critical thinking processes with literary structures. My research assumes that all aspects or content within a story are conveyed to the reader by means of the structures that we call ‘story’.

2.5 Semiotics and Structures

Semiotic theories inquire into how we perceive the world and produce meaning. For meaning to be communicable to others, it must be structured into some form. Semiotics focuses on the structure and function of signs and sign systems—the symbols, words and images we use to communicate meaning. A structural and relational approach to language is built upon the idea that, “the full significance of any entity or experience cannot be perceived unless and until it is integrated into the structure of which it forms a part” (Hawkes, 1977, p. 18). Our intellectual activities strive to form “general concepts out of specific impressions ... directed toward breaking the isolation of the datum, wresting it from the ‘here and now’ of its actual occurrence, relating it to other things and gathering it and them into some inclusive order, into the unity of a ‘system’” (Cassirer, 1946, p. 25). Underlying my research is the idea that the study of both the linguistic and literary aspects of language, an organized human
system, needs to include the study of its structures. Because these structures are the ways we make sense of our experiences, a study of structures may align with the relational way we think.

2.6 Structures and Literary Theory

Saussure (1915), a Swiss linguist and the ‘father’ of semiotics, insisted that language always functions as a unified and complete system. A structured and relational system (langue) makes possible an infinite number of unique individual utterances (parole). The system or structure cannot be seen on its own, but is seen through the individual utterances. One of the most important contributions that he made to the study of language was in his “rejection of [a] ‘substantive’ view of the subject in favour of a ‘relational’ one” (Hawkes, 1977, p. 19). An item is meaningful by how it is combined with other items and how it is different from other items (another significant idea). He explained that a study or description of language must consider both combinatory and opposing relations. The relationships between units of meaning are how a story is coded to convey meaning and also a primary way that we think.

The idea of structure and variation was explored in the literary studies by the Russian Formalists. They were interested in knowing how literature ‘worked’ and the forms that all literary texts have in common. They took a scientific approach to literature, looking for general principles (Bertens, 2008). They distinguished between the story (fabula) and the narrative or discourse (sjuzhet): the story as the actual account of a sequence of events, and a narrative that presents these events in a particular order (Culler, 1981). This was an interesting distinction because essentially, one story could be presented through a variety of different narrations.

Vladimir Propp (1928) was influenced by this notion of one story and many narratives and extended linguistic morphology studies into the study of stories. He studied 167 Russian folktales and observed a remarkable similarity between them. Although the names of the dramatis personae differed from tale to tale, the functions they performed did not. He saw that folktales made use of a large number of characters who performed only a
small number of functions significant to the plot. He formulated his observations into two principles:

- The functions of characters serve as stable, constant elements in a tale, independent of how and by whom they are fulfilled. They constitute the fundamental components of a tale.
- The number of functions known to the fairy tale is limited. (p. 21)

Propp discerned thirty-one of these functions and concluded that this was a means by which tales could be analyzed.

Later research attempted to “make the structure of the sentence roughly homologous to the ‘plot’ of a text” (Culler, 1975, p. 82). Greimas (1966) considered the story an extended sentence structure. He formulated a ‘grammar’ of narrative that incorporated both Saussure’s notion of opposition and Propp’s functions. He grouped the functions into oppositional pairs to emphasize the relationships between them, for example, Subject versus Object incorporated Propp’s hero and sought-for person and generated a story’s quest. Of significance was the developing idea that literature could be analyzed by relating and contrasting its functional elements.

Lévi-Strauss (1958) applied Saussure’s linguistic structures to anthropology. Like Saussure, he was interested in universals (structures). In his work in anthropology, studying kinships, he described particular instances with structural analyses. For example, instead of analyzing separate family units (e.g., father or son), he found the relationships between family units to be of fundamental importance. His examinations of cultural mythologies led him to believe that similar mythical units were expressed across various cultures and these units (he called mythemes) were related through oppositions. He argued that myths, like language, are made up of essential units of meaning, and meaning in myths lie not in the isolated units but in how they are combined. Lévi-Strauss (1958) suggested that, the “intellectual process involved in mythical thought is as rigorous as that of scientific

3 Propp’s (1928/1968) 31 functions are: absentation, interdiction, violation of the interdiction, reconnaissance, delivery, trickery, complicity, villainy, lack, mediation, beginning counteraction, departure, first function of the donor, the hero’s reaction, receipt of a magical agent, guidance to object, struggle, branding, victory, liquidation of misfortune, return, pursuit, rescue, unrecognized arrival, unfounded claims, difficult task, solution, exposure, transfiguration, punishment & wedding.
thinking” (p. xiv). He considered oppositions and logical relations to be the way language is built to make meaning possible and communicable.

Polti (1945) examined 1200 stories across genres, cultures and history. These stories revealed a rich variation of characters, details and images, yet showed little variance in the primary actions of the characters. Polti categorized these actions into 36 distinct plots. More recently, Booker (2004) showed how the number of plot categories could be narrowed down to seven. Like Polti, Booker reviewed numerous stories across genres and related them to the seven plots. He acknowledges that his ideas were derived from Northrop Frye.

In the *Anatomy of Criticism*, Frye (1957) formulated a literary criticism which he derived exclusively from literature. He divided his study into theories of the modes, symbols, myths and genres of literature, primarily identifying and relating what is typical or archetypal. He showed fiction to be structured by four archetypal plots: the tragic, ironic, comic and romantic. Frye extensively demonstrated how these plot structures relate to our experiences of the cyclical processes of nature, of which the solar cycle is primary. In other words, the way we think and the structures we form retain their connections to our experiences and perceptions in the world. Our cultural myths of the death and rebirth of gods correspond to the disappearance and reappearance of the sun in the day, the night and the change in seasons. Thus a tragic plot is related to autumn, a time when the sun and life (fertility) are fading; an ironic plot relates to the winter, a time of darkness and death; a comedic plot is centered on the spring, a time of emerging light and rebirth; and finally a romantic plot is one of summer, a time of full light and activity. Within these literary structures the characters, actions and setting are related in typical ways.

Meaning can be derived through the relations within a system, whether that system is social (Lévi-Strauss, 1958), linguistic (Saussure, 1915) or literary (Frye, 1957; Lévi-Strauss, 1958). My research premise is that, following the relational ideas of Saussure, Lévi-Strauss, and Frye, children can be taught how the underlying unified structures of literature make possible the infinite variety of stories they experience. Stories are coded through functional and relational structures (units or blocks of meaning), and can therefore be ‘de-coded’ by the
same structures. Children (as readers) can re-create stories by examining the very structures by which stories were organized (by writers) to convey meaning.

2.7 A New Conceptual Literary (Narrative) Framework

Reading is a cognitive process of understanding. It is with the mind, not through eyes, that meaning is ‘seen’. Through cognition processes, children come to understand the meaning of what they are reading. When looking to the future of reading comprehension research, Pressley (2008) suggested that the “study of literature in general and/or character studies in particular can teach higher level and abstract thinking skills such as grappling with complex concepts and thinking reflectively” (p. 388). The study of literature requires a study of how literature is structured, which includes the patterns, functions and relations of its images, words and symbols.

Although there is an abundance of research and study into literature and stories, very little has been introduced into elementary education. Working primarily in education at the university level, Frye (1988) insisted that the criticism of literature can be taught to elementary children through what is typical in literature and through the contrasts and relations of the characters, settings, actions and images. Teachers require a means by which they can easily begin teaching the processes of critical literary thinking to their students. My understanding of literary structures began with Frye’s (1957) *Anatomy of Criticism*. From here, the rudiments of an elementary literary (narrative) criticism developed. Through both linguistic and literary research, I began to articulate the structures of narratives and to develop a comprehensive, unified and easy way for students to approach reading. The approach I outline shows how stories are structured to convey meaning.

2.7.1 Narrative Functions

Stories are a form of narrative. “At their simplest, all narratives are the movement from a beginning point to a finishing point. Narrative is just a sequence which starts and moves inexorably to its end. To understand this is to understand the most important principle behind narrative” (Cobley, 2001, p. 9). A story begins with characters and their actions and places them in a particular setting. As the story moves to new places and new times, characters perform new actions or new characters are introduced. So a story can be seen as a
movement or sequence of characters and actions through time and space, from beginning to end. Frequently a story begins at home and presents the initial situation of the characters, actions and setting. Critical to this beginning point is the identification of something that is wanted or lacking in the story. The hero of the story can be identified as the character who leaves home and sets out on an adventure in an attempt to obtain what is wanted and to satisfy the lack. The hero is defined by its function in the story and its relation to the want/lack of the story. In other words, this character is understood by its fundamental action and relations. Stories can be seen, so far, as structured by three functions:

1. Home (initial situation)
2. Hero
3. Lack (or want)

To get what is wanted, the hero of the narrative moves in time and place and performs new actions. Stories follow a series of these moves until the end, forming another functional block of meaning:

4. Move

As the hero moves in time and place, she may meet with new characters who also perform new actions. Within one story and across many stories, these new characters will perform an unlimited number of actions. However, these new characters and their actions can be categorized by their functional relationship to the hero and the lack of the story. New characters will function to either help the hero obtain what is wanted or function to block the hero from getting what is wanted. Again we can categorize these characters by what they do. A villain functions to block the hero from getting what is wanted. In contrast a helper will function to help the hero get what is wanted. Thus there are two more narrative functions:

5. Villain
6. Helper

If a character functions to help, it is usually in one of three typical ways: the helper possesses a quality that the hero does not have or needs more of, and so will accompany the hero through the story; the helper offers advice that will serve the hero at that moment or later on; or, the helper will give the hero an object that will be useful at some point in the
story. The help, the advice or the given object are forms of a token, which function in relation to the helper, who functions in relation to the hero and what is wanted. So, a story is structured by means of another functional unit:

7. Token

At the beginning of the story the hero leaves home and goes on an adventure in search of something that is wanted. The end of a story is reached once the hero succeeds in obtaining what is wanted and he returns home, no longer wanting. This movement back home serves as the final function of a story:

8. HOME - satisfied lack

These eight narrative functions (Portier, 2009) structure a story syntactically (syntagmatically or sequentially) much like the syntax of a sentence. Each unit functions in relation to the other units to form a complete whole. By this means students can begin to analyze and comprehend stories as a unified whole by following its structural parts as they combine and unfold in time (Frye, 1988).

Following Saussure and Lévi-Strauss, a story is not only understood through its sequential relations but also through its contrasting relations. The hero functions in contrast to the villain by its actions, qualities and characteristics. The helper and villain contrast in how they relate to the hero and want. The settings can be contrasted at the beginning (home) and the end (HOME). Settings can be related as each ‘move’ is made and can be related or contrasted to the characters who appear in them. Drawing from Frye, solar, nature and human cycles can be related to each of the functions.

By relating these eight functions, children can begin to make sense of a story by re-creating it “for a story can only be “realized” when its parts and whole can, as it were, be made whole” (Bruner, 1991, p. 8). Children can use these functions as a framework to make sense of an infinite number of stories, for without an analytical framework, “every story may seem new, and the resulting experience of reading is highly disjointed” (Foster, 2003, p. 28). With experience, readers can come to realize that stories are born of other stories. The more stories that are read, the more stories begin to look like other stories. Deep comprehension may be hindered if reading remains disjointed.
This narrative framework is conceptual in that it involves abstract ideas that are figured out in the specifics of the story. Concepts and conceptual thinking involve a connection between abstract ideas and specific experiences. These eight functions are structural concepts that can only be understood through concrete reading experiences. Although there are only a finite number of functions, they are dynamic in that they allow for open-ended relations and thus infinite variation. In other words, while the structures remain fixed, the forms of each function can vary across stories. In addition, how the functions contrast or combine does not follow a predetermined sequence. They can be combined and recombined in an infinite number of ways. This is how narrative functions can serve as a literary schema applicable to all stories.

The narrative functions can provide a way for children to read a story as a unified whole, yet also be a means to relate one story to its context within a body of literature. Children can compare and contrast stories to other stories through the functions, which may help them begin to see patterns in images and symbols. Children can begin to understand the ‘archetypal’ aspect of stories: the typical or recurring rhythms in the settings, characters and actions that give shape to stories. This element of stories is “provided by the cyclical rhythm of nature: the four seasons of the year moving from spring to winter and back to spring again; the daily cycle of the sun moving from dawn to darkness to a new dawn” (Frye, 1988, p. 116). The sun rises into the sky to give us light and then leaves us in darkness as it descends. This contrast between light and dark can be seen explicitly in cultural mythology, sometimes presented as worlds of gods and worlds of demons, and in folklore and stories (including those of movies, games, virtual settings) to signify a world that is desirable contrasted with a world that is undesirable. Worlds that are desirable are metaphorically associated with ascents and worlds that are undesirable, associated metaphorically with descents. These patterns can be related to the narrative functions.

2.7.2 Plot Categories

Frye (1957) showed how the mythos of spring provided the archetypal plot structure of comedy. A comedy is a movement of the hero from an undesirable world of darkness into a desired world of light. If the events of a comedy were plotted metaphorically (undesirable
as down; desirable as up), then we would see a movement down followed by a turn and movement upward. This upward turn frequently corresponds to a spring setting when the days become longer and brighter and new life begins. The hero leaves behind the darkness of the world that is not wanted, and emerges, into the light of the world that is desired. The contrasting archetypal plot would be that of tragedy, where the hero descends into a dark or undesirable world and does not emerge. This frequently corresponds to autumn (the fall) when the night becomes longer and nature begins to die.

Comedy and tragedy provide further dynamic structures by which the narrative functions relate to one another. In a comedic plot, the hero leaves home to satisfy a lack, descends into a world where she does not have what is desired, moves through new settings and encounters helpers or villains, and finally emerges into the world she desires, where all lacks have been satisfied. The home at the beginning of the story can now be contrasted with the HOME at the end of the story and all images related to a literal and/or metaphorical movement from dark to light in the story. Both villains and helpers can also be associated with the places corresponding to the desired and undesired worlds.

Six plot categories also shape stories: Overcoming the Monster, Redemption, Quest, Rags to Riches, Rebirth, and Innocence to Experience (the definitions of these plot categories are found in Table 1). These categories provide a way to see a whole story as one unit of meaning because they place emphasis on different functions or relations. These plot categories, along with the narrative functions, help reveal unity across many different stories. “A work of literature … not only has a narrative movement and a unified structure; it also has a context within literature” (Frye, 1988, p. 111). The literary framework that this research introduced to the students, attempts to show how narratives are connected one to another by means of their organizing codes. The notion of intertextuality is credited to Julia Kristeva who stated that, “every text is from the outset under the jurisdiction of other discourses which impose a universe on it” (cited in Culler, 1981, p. 105). For Kristeva, meaning does not move directly from the writer to the reader. Instead meaning is mediated through shared textual codes, known (consciously or not) by both writer and reader. The writer, the text and the reader depend upon these prior codes. My framework attempts to offer readers (students) a
way to ‘de-construct’ narratives using the shared literary codes (or narrative structures) used by writers to ‘construct’ it.

2.7.3 Summary of the Literary Framework

I have outlined a framework that greatly expands from typical models used in elementary education and builds upon literary theory. This framework, summarized in Figure 1, may provide a means by which all aspects of a story can be related to a story’s structure so that a story’s ‘ideas’ are unified with its structure. To support the teachers and students in their implementation of the narrative framework, I provided each classroom with manipulatives, in the form of cards. Each card contained a picture or symbol to signify one of the narrative functions, primary needs, or plot categories.

By approaching students’ literary instruction structurally, perhaps several educational concerns can be addressed: students’ reading comprehension can deepen and they can develop their critical reading; students can move deeper into a critical study of the literary aspect of language; students can develop their literary background knowledge which can be transferred from story to story; and, students can relate the content or ideas of a story to how a story is structured to convey meaning.

2.7.4 Definition of Terms

In this paper, I have used terms that have different meanings across the many fields of research. I offer brief definitions of how I am using these terms throughout this paper:

• Critical thinking as higher order thinking processes
• Higher order thinking as the different processes that involve drawing relations
• Structures as dynamic, enduring and infinite not static and limiting
• Narrative as “an account of events occurring over time” (Bruner, 1991, p. 6)
• Story is used interchangeably with narrative
• Functions to mean the units of meaning that structure a narrative
• Literary concepts as the structural ideas of literature based on their relations to one another

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5 These narrative cards are copyrighted to Tiny Woman Wordshop.
• Literature as “the total body of stories and symbols that provides hypotheses or models of human behaviour and experience” (Frye, 1988, p. 137)

• Fiction and nonfiction stories: Although the content is often derived from items, images or experiences in the ‘real’ or sensory world, both are organized as narratives and thus meaning is conveyed by means of the functions and relations of their structures, and the content understood in relation to these structures.
Figure 1: Literary framework used in this research. See Table 1 for a summary of the definitions of each concept.
### Table 1

**Basic Definitions of Literary Framework Concepts**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Concepts</th>
<th>Definitions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Narrative Functions</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home</td>
<td>The initial situation of a story. Here the characters, lacks/wants, and setting are introduced.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hero</td>
<td>The character who goes on an adventure to get what is wanted.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack/want</td>
<td>Something that is wanted in the story, typically connected to a lack in the primary human needs (food, clothing, shelter, health, love or freedom).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Move</td>
<td>The hero moves in time and place to search for what is wanted.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Villain</td>
<td>A character (or other element) that attempts to block the hero from getting what is wanted (or satisfying the lack).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helper</td>
<td>A character (or other element) that helps the hero get what is wanted (or satisfying the lack).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Token</td>
<td>The help offered by the helper: the helper, advice or an object.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HOME</td>
<td>The want of the story has been obtained (all lacks are satisfied).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Plot</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comedy</td>
<td>The upward turning plot structure, where the hero obtains what is wanted.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tragedy</td>
<td>The downward turning plot structure, where the hero fails to obtain what is wanted.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>World We Want</td>
<td>Relates to the HOME function, when the hero has satisfied the lacks in the story.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>World We Don’t Want</td>
<td>Corresponds to the events/moves that contrast with the world we want.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Plot Categories</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overcoming the Monster</td>
<td>The hero must overcome a monster/ to get what is wanted.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Redemption</td>
<td>To get what is wanted, the hero must be set free from an internal block (quality)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quest</td>
<td>The hero goes on an adventure in search of what is wanted.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rags to Riches</td>
<td>The hero leaves behind an external world that was not wanted and enters a world that is wanted.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rebirth</td>
<td>To get what is wanted, the hero literally or metaphorically passes through death, leaves behind the unwanted world, and emerges into a new and desired life.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Innocence to Experience</td>
<td>The hero gets what is wanted after learning something about him or herself or the world.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3. Design and Methodology

3.1 Research Goals

Underlying a structural approach to language instruction is the theory that literature is an expression of human intellectual development and is vital for a child’s full cognitive development. The goal of my research is to investigate how teachers can develop students’ literary frameworks, building on their experiences of fiction. Fiction is coded through functional and relational units of meaning. By drawing relations between these units students may be able to move toward ‘deeper’ comprehension and engage in higher order thinking. I will be investigating an instructional approach, based on my fictional narrative framework and implemented by classroom teachers, that intends to engage students in critical thinking while analyzing how a story is coded to convey meaning. Specifically, my research questions are: 1) How do elementary students interact with and respond to stories by means of these literary structures? 2) How can teachers work with children to analyze how a story is coded to convey meaning?

3.2 Research Design

This paper will present data from a grade 1 and a grade 2 classroom emerging from a formative experiment. Formative experiments arose from a desire for a methodology that could bridge the gap between theory and practice, addressing the question of “how promising instructional interventions might be implemented in classrooms to achieve valued pedagogical goals” (Reinking & Bradley, 2004, p. 151). Data collection and analysis are intended to contribute and develop relevant and achievable classroom practices and then in turn to re-inform theory and research. Some researchers refer to this kind of practice-oriented methodology as a formative experiment (Duke & Mallette, 2004), while others describe it as action research (Cohen et al., 2005; Lodico et al., 2010). Even within these texts, different terms are used that suggest the variation within action research: formative experiment (Newman, 1990; Somekh, 1995), design experiments (Collins, 1992), teacher research (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993), participatory action research (McTaggart, 1997), practitioner research (Anderson et al., 1994), emancipatory praxis (Lewin, 1948), critical action research, practical action research, critical pedagogy, and collaborative inquiry. These differences can
be categorized either as action research whose goal is directed toward a community or culture, analyzing this larger context in which an education system is embedded; or, action research directed toward the everyday activities within a classroom or instructional context.

Although the goal directions may differ, all action research approaches attempt to improve education through the implementation of theory or researched-based practices, which are then studied collaboratively, by the researcher and participants, through a systematic spiral process of planning, acting, observing and reflecting (Cohen et al., 2005). A formative experiment approach best suited my research needs.

3.3 Formative Experiments

Formative experiments move from theory and educational goals to focus on a particular intervention. The researcher can ask, “given that intervention X (or pedagogical theory Y) shows promise to bring about a valued pedagogical goal, can it be implemented to accomplish that goal, and, if so, how?” (Reinking & Bradley, 2004, p. 153). With the addition of this “how” question, researchers are able to move beyond observing what may happen as a result of an action toward determining whether a desired end is achieved. They can also attempt to extend the results beyond formal hypothesis testing by accommodating classroom variations and adapting the design in response to these variations (Reinking & Bradley, 2004). Researchers can work with teachers and children to adapt and improve instructional approaches within the learning context.

Reinking and Bradley (2004) adapted and extended the work of Cobb, Confrey, diSessa, Lehrer and Schauble (2003), to outline the methodological characteristics of a formative experiment. These characteristics distinguish it from other forms of action research. I will explain each of these characteristics to show how this form of methodology best fits my research goals.

3.3.1 Theoretical framework. In a formative experiment, theory frames the whole of the research. It justifies the importance of the research questions, provides a rationale for the intervention and is used to interpret findings and contextualize the conclusions. My approach to reading instruction has been developed from literary theory, specifically research in narratology. It involves analyzing the structures of literature and how they may align with the
cognitive processes that are critical to a child’s development. These theories served to develop and frame the instructional approach implemented in the primary classrooms for this study, and framed how I coded and analyzed my data.

3.3.2 Interventionist and goal oriented. Like all forms of action research, a formative experiment investigates how to enact changes in education. It “investigates how to improve education and learning toward well-specified goals that are explicitly justified in relation to theory and practice” (Reinking & Bradley, 2004, p. 159). Unlike other forms of action research, a formative experiment often specifies an intervention or approach that shows promise to achieve a particular educational goal. I have outlined an approach to the instruction of fictional narrative structures that shows promise to support a child’s cognitive development and critical literary comprehension.

Before deciding upon a specific plan of action, reconnaissance is often taken of the research context and then specific achievable steps are formulated (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1981). Although my research inquiry is new, it is connected to my years of teaching elementary students. During those years, I became well aware of the educational expectations of the Ontario Ministry of Education (2006), as well as other Canadian and international language curricula, various forms of reading assessments, and, most importantly, how children learn to read and how deeply they love stories. I was also able to ‘pilot’ this literary framework in the classrooms of many teacher colleagues. These classroom experiences provided insight into how a literary framework could be explained to teachers and then adapted for younger or older children.

3.3.3 Iterative. Formative experiments are structured around a rigorous and continuous cycle of implementation and revision through data collection and analysis, which is aimed at “determining what contextual factors enhance or inhibit the intervention’s effectiveness” (Reinking & Bradley, 2004, p. 159). Thus, while keeping the educational goal in mind, changes can be made to the intervention and to the data collection. To allow for these potential and desired changes, a formative experiment is typically conducted over long intervals of time. Lewin (1948) divides the cyclical process into four stages—planning, acting, observing and reflecting.
I chose this research design so that the teacher-participants and I could meet several times throughout the year, in a form of collaborative teacher inquiry (Ontario Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat, 2010), with two goals in mind: to enable the teachers to learn more about literary structures; and, to discuss how they could apply their new understandings to meet their classroom instructional needs. Because I could not predict what understandings each teacher would take from our meetings or how they would choose to implement this approach in their classrooms, the iterative aspect of a formative experiment provided an ideal way to work with the dynamics of actual classroom teaching.

3.3.4 Transformational. Transformation is at the heart of a formative experiment. New teaching practices may have desired outcomes yet they remain open to unintended or unexpected consequences. A formative experiment is employed when the guiding question is “what could be?” while keeping in mind what is workable (Reinking, Malloy, Rogers & Robbins, 2007). A formative experiment implements a strong theoretical and potentially practical intervention within a dynamic framework. It is precisely because of the strong theoretical tie that the outcomes can contribute to theory, suggest further research, or refine the intervention.

My research has potential implications for the field of literacy instruction. Teaching narrative structures may be a very good way to develop critical thinking skills in children and my research may show ways that educators can do so at an experiential and conceptual level. In addition, my research has the potential to offer a framework for literary practices that can be applied to any narrative, including texts being read, viewed, composed, filmed, or interacted with through another form of media.

3.3.5 Pragmatic. This characteristic of formative experiments refers to more than just practical applications of theory. The theory itself is concerned with what is experiential. Further, the entire research process depends upon collaboration with those who will insist that realistic and sensible steps be taken. One of the primary concerns that I wanted to explore in this research is the flexibility and adaptability of this literary approach in response to different students’ learning levels and different teachers’ instruction.
3.4 Research Site and Participants

I chose a formative experiment so that I could examine an instructional approach in the natural settings of primary classrooms. Therefore, it was of utmost importance that I collaborated with teachers and students within the everyday context of their classroom language instruction periods.

3.4.1 Research site. An inner-city school setting was important to my research for I am interested in how teachers can develop students’ literary schema without the need to rely on students' having the same personal or home experiences. From my own experience teaching within several inner-city public schools, I know that the children come from a wide range of cultural backgrounds, and arrive at school with a range of home experiences.

My research was carried out in one inner-city elementary public school in Toronto. In previous years, I had given after-school presentations to teachers in several schools, focusing on language structures, specifically the relations between reading and writing. During one of these presentations, I explained my proposed research study. The principal, a grade 1, and a grade 2 teacher showed interest in participating so I arranged to volunteer in the two classrooms a few times during the last term of the year. This volunteer time gave these two teachers an opportunity to become comfortable with a researcher in their classrooms and gave me a chance to recruit a few more participants. During this time, I met with three other teachers who also agreed to participate.

The school is located within a lower socioeconomic part of the city, in a neighbourhood that has experienced gang activity and violence. The school community is comprised of families with very diverse cultural backgrounds including refugees and immigrants, households with a single parent or a sole-providing parent, families living in public housing, and many families living below the poverty line. The school population reflects the community demographics, with about half the students' first language being other than English, although most of the students attending this school were born in Canada.

3.4.2 Teacher participants. The classroom setting was important to my research, allowing me to observe the real experiences and practices of teachers. In formative experiments an intervention is connected to the context and with the people it serves.
Participants and researchers share an interest in the educational goal being achieved. For my study, I developed a professional relationship with the principal of the school, who was interested in the outcomes of my research. The principal was supportive of the different levels of involvement that best suited each teacher and her teaching situation.

Five female elementary teachers participated in this research, Lydia, Suzanne, Aimee, Jade and Mari⁶, and they taught grades 1, 1/2, 2, 2 and 3 respectively. Four of the teachers began the study in August, and Suzanne joined the meetings when she became part of the school staff in October. The teachers completed a brief survey about their backgrounds (see Appendix A). As shown in Table 2, none of the teachers had a background in literary studies. They simply showed an interest in the structural approach that I was researching and the collaborative nature of the professional development meetings that I proposed. Their classroom experiences ranged from 2 to 25 years and they all had taught more than one grade.

All the teachers organized their classrooms in similar ways, providing a place for meetings and group lessons, a library/reading space, and assigned work desks/spaces in groups of about four or five students. Although some of the teachers planned lessons together, they all had their own style of approaching group lessons, independent student assignments, small group work and student sharing.

The teachers' cultural identities reflected those of the students within their school. They identified themselves as Asian (Cantonese speaking), Canadian-Jamaican, Anglo-Indian, West Indian and Black Canadian (see Table 2).

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⁶ All the names used in this paper are pseudonyms.
### Table 2

**Background Information about Teacher-Participants**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Lydia</th>
<th>Suzanne</th>
<th>Aimee</th>
<th>Jade</th>
<th>Mari</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Grade</strong></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1/2</td>
<td>2a</td>
<td>2b</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cultural Background</strong></td>
<td>Asian (Cantonese Speaking)</td>
<td>Canadian-Jamaican</td>
<td>Anglo-Indian</td>
<td>West Indian</td>
<td>Black Canadian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Experience</strong></td>
<td>8 years</td>
<td>2 years</td>
<td>25 years</td>
<td>5 years</td>
<td>11 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Range of Grades Taught</strong></td>
<td>K, 1, 3</td>
<td>1, 2, 3</td>
<td>2, 3, 4, 5</td>
<td>K, 1, 2, 3, Special Education</td>
<td>3, 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Background in Literary Studies</strong></td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 3.4.3 Student participants

The teacher-participants incorporated the literary narrative structures into their language programs, so all their students benefitted from this research. Students in all of the four classrooms reflected the cultural demographics of the community (see Table 3).

### Table 3

**Ethnic Background of Students**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnic Origins by Region</th>
<th>Grade 1</th>
<th>Grade 2a</th>
<th>Grade 2b</th>
<th>Grade 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>African</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caribbean</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East &amp; Southeast Asian</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>European</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latin, Central &amp; South American</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle Eastern</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Asian</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Total Number of Students**

|                         | 20      | 21      | 18      | 22      |

Near the end of September, the grade 1 and 2a teachers (Lydia and Aimee) met with me to choose a focus group of students from their classrooms. We choose ten students from each class (total = 20) who, as best as possible, represented the range of academic, gender,
and ethnic backgrounds within each class. Most of the data that I collected focused on these 20 students. However, I collected some data from all thirty-five students from grades 1 and 2a who returned consent forms: all 20 of the grade 1 students and 15 of the 21 grade 2 students.

On the grade 3 EQAO\textsuperscript{7} tests, this school's results, averaged over several years, has shown about half the students achieving at the provincial standard in reading, and slightly over half in writing. The grade 1 and 2a classes reflected this academic pattern, with 53% and 50% respectively entering the grade close to or within the expected reading levels. Thus 47% of grade 1 and 50% of grade 2a students were below expected reading levels. The grade 2b and 3 classes had slightly more students, 67% and 61%, entering the grade close to or within the expected reading levels.

Ms. Aimee and Ms. Lydia were the language arts teachers for all their students except for two students in grade 2. One girl was new to the school and new to English. She attended the grade 2a class for most of the day and for most subjects but was withdrawn for language support during the language arts period. One boy was also withdrawn frequently during the morning language arts period, during which time he received academic support. The remaining students in the grades 1 and 2a classes all spoke English, some as their second language and most as their first language. Although of the students’ parents were not fluent in English, all the students could participate in lessons and converse in English with their classmates and teachers.

3.5 Research Questions

The questions to be investigated in my research were: 1) How do elementary students interact with and respond to stories by means of these literary structures? 2) How can teachers work with children to analyze how a story is coded to convey meaning? Lodico, Spaulding and Voegtle (2010) suggested that qualitative researchers develop subquestions before beginning research and as the research progresses. These sub-questions help “the researcher to focus data collection and allow the data collections to proceed in a systematic way, but they should not predetermine what the researcher will find” (p. 163). From each of

\textsuperscript{7} Ontario's Education, Quality and Accountability Office standardized assessment measure.
my primary research questions, I considered several sub-questions to guide my data collection and analysis, as follows:

1) How do elementary students interact with and respond to stories by means of literary structures?
   - How do students use literary structures?
   - How do student responses change over a school year?
   - How do student responses differ across the two different grades?

2) How can teachers work with children to analyze how a story is coded to convey meaning?
   - How are these codes (literary framework) used in the elementary classroom?
   - What kinds of questions can be developed that might focus students on literary narrative structures?
   - How do teaching practices and questions vary according to the type of story or type of text (e.g. cultural or media variation)?

3.6 Research Process

This study followed a four-stage cyclical process of planning, acting, observing and reflecting (Reinking & Bradley, 2004).

3.6.1 Planning. The teachers and I met in August, October, December and March of the 2010/2011 school year, to analyze stories by their literary narrative structures. Each meeting lasted for about two hours and we analyzed the following stories (see Appendix B for full references):

- *The Boy and the Giants* (Moodie, 1993), a retold traditional Scottish tale (August)
- *Mufaro's Beautiful Daughters* (Steptoe, 1987), a retold African tale (October)
- *Dragon Slayer* (Kuczera, 2004), an animated short film (December)
- *Qalupalik* (Papatsie, 2010), an Inuit legend retold in an animated short film (March)

I decided to begin our first meeting with an analysis of *The Boy and the Giants* (Moodie, 1993) because all eight of the narrative functions were present and there was some complexity in the plot. *Mufaro's Beautiful Daughters* (Steptoe, 1987) was suggested by the grade 2a teacher as it was one of her favourite stories, and in previous years her students had
enjoyed it. I selected *Dragon Slayer* (Kuczera, 2004) because we wanted to apply our narrative structures to a media form other than print. *Dragon Slayer* (Kuczera, 2004) provided us with two changes from printed text. It was an animated short film, only 6 minutes long, and except for a very brief introduction, it was told without words. Our analysis of this story would be based on the organization of images and sounds. Finally I chose *Qalupalik* (Papatsie, 2010) for our final analysis because it was based on a Canadian Aboriginal (Inuit) legend and it was also an animated short film—the students and teachers had thoroughly enjoyed the *Dragon Slayer* (Kuczera, 2004) analysis. *Qalupalik* (Papatsie, 2010) also gave us a chance to discuss a new plot structure, with some complexity in the ending. *Qalupalik* (Papatsie, 2010) was produced in partnership with the Canadian National Film Board, and lists grades 3+ as the target audience for the lesson plans they provided for teachers. However, after our analysis, the teachers felt that because their students had analyzed so many stories throughout the year, and because we were using our own plans, the grade 1 and 2 students would enjoy watching this story.

Each of our meetings began with our reading or watching a story together followed by sharing our initial responses. We then discussed which plot category we thought organized the story and used the narrative functions to explore the relations. Our discussions then turned to how the teachers might approach their language instruction, which structures might be the focus, how this instruction would be integrated with other curricular subjects and expectations, and what kind of relational questions could guide instruction, activities and discourse. For our last two story analyses, we moved our planning sessions and many of the student lessons onto interactive whiteboards, which had recently been installed in all of their classrooms. Within a few days of each meeting, I typed up a transcript of our discussions and the questions we developed around the narrative structures. I gave each teacher a copy of the questions and related notes drawn from our meetings.

I made myself available to assist each teacher in aligning these new lessons with the curriculum expectations for oral communication, reading, writing and media literacy (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2006). Because one of my intentions was for this literary framework approach to help unify teachers’ language lessons, I have read and aligned many of these
lessons with curriculum from various Canadian provinces and countries. However, the teachers were secure in their curriculum knowledge and easily found which expectations were being addressed during their lessons, how to assess (both formative and summative) their students’ learning, and how this affected their reporting. Frequently their lessons addressed expectations from several areas and the teachers often posted these expectations on the classroom and hallway walls beside student work.

3.6.2 Acting. The teachers used their new understandings from our meetings, and the information on the notes I gave them, to develop their own classroom lessons and activities. The teachers based their instruction on the same literary concepts, with each adapting the questions or ideas to her own teaching style and to suit the needs of the students she taught.

I did not direct the classroom teaching but I was available to answer questions or to discuss lessons and possible next instructional steps. Each teacher responded to this study in different ways. The grade 1 teacher, Lydia, contacted me frequently by email and we met many times to talk about lessons, student responses and next steps. The grade 1/2 teacher, Suzanne, participated in our group meetings but I did not visit her classroom because she had joined the study after our first meeting, in October, and I did not have time to add additional classroom visits to my schedule. However, she worked closely with Aimee and Jade to discuss lessons and activities. The grade 2a teacher, Aimee, met with me after almost all my observation visits, mainly to talk about her students' responses to the lessons she had planned. The grade 2b teacher, Jade, asked to meet with me once after school to talk about lessons and occasionally we spoke after my visits. The grade 3 teacher, Mari, met with me briefly after a few visits and stopped me in the halls to share her reflections on lessons that I had not observed. The teachers frequently met with each other to discuss curriculum and planning.

3.6.3 Observing. As the teachers acted on their plans, I observed their lessons and recorded or noted their students' responses. At the onset of this study, I had envisioned visiting four of the classrooms each week or every second week during the language lessons. However, the frequency of my visits (see Table 4) was left up to the individual teachers
according to their comfort with having a researcher observing their classes, or their particular classroom or school situations.

Table 4

*Observations in Teachers’ Classrooms*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Grade 1</th>
<th>Grade 2a</th>
<th>Grade 2b</th>
<th>Grade 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of Visits</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observation Hours</td>
<td>45.25</td>
<td>30.25</td>
<td>15.5</td>
<td>13.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lessons Observed</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Despite the range in the number of visits I made to each classroom, all five teachers showed equal interest and participation in our group meetings. For example, I had suggested that we cancel our last meeting because of the difficulty we were having coordinating our after school schedules. This was met with a resounding “no” and then schedules were quickly adjusted so that we could meet.

My observations of each of the four classrooms were very different, which led to some changes in my data collection and how I approached the data analysis.

3.6.3.1 Grade 1. Lydia frequently commented that she viewed this research as a great professional development opportunity. We set up weekly observation times for literacy lessons and activities, well beyond the focus stories. The students quickly became accustomed to my presence and to my recording their conversations and photographing their work. My involvement in this class took many different forms: at times I sat and observed lessons without interruption; other times the teacher asked for my input during lessons; sometimes I responded to students’ questions during discussions; and very often I talked with students as they worked. Over the year, I collected data during 37 lessons in Lydia’s classroom. There my role varied from a moderate to an active participant. I sat with or very close to the students during lessons, spoke during lessons, led parts of a few lessons, and worked with students who requested help. The students spoke to me as though I was another teacher in the school. Lydia enjoyed listening to my audio recordings of her class discussions; so much so, that within a few weeks of our study, she purchased her own audio
recorder and sent me audio files of many lessons and discussions that I had not been able to observe.

3.6.3.2 Grade 2a. Aimee offered her classroom as a 'home base' for me. When visiting with any teacher, I stored my things in her room. This made me a regular visitor to her grade 2 students even when I was not observing their lessons and activities. In total, I observed and collected data during 28 lessons in this class. Aimee was comfortable with my audio-recording her lessons and she read through the transcripts I gave her and often shared her own observations with me. She frequently kept my extra recorder to capture pertinent lessons that I was not able to observe. In this classroom, my role was the same as in the grade 1 class.

3.6.3.3 Grade 2b. Jade invited me to observe 11 lessons over the year with 7 of these occurring during the final school term, after our final story analysis. Since Jade continued participating in our group meetings and planning with the other grade 2 teachers, the infrequency of my observations was not due to any dissatisfaction with the new practices. It was possible that the Additional Qualification course that she attended in the evenings placed demands on her time. It is also possible that she needed more time to become comfortable with a researcher observing her lessons, which explains why she began requesting more visits toward the end of the year. My role in this classroom fluctuated between being a passive observer, watching from 'outside' the group, and being a moderate observer, who occasionally helped the students or responded to questions.

3.6.3.4 Grade 3. Mari invited me to observe a couple of times for each focus story, resulting in some data collected for about eight lessons over the school year. She found it difficult to find time for my visits because class schedules and government test preparation placed many demands and responsibilities on her. In the year my study took place, the class sizes throughout the school were unexpectedly large and classroom restructuring occurred in October when a new teacher was hired (the fifth teacher, Suzanne, who joined our story analysis group). This affected the grade 3 class since many students were going to be moved to another classroom. It was difficult for me to gather sufficient data from the grade 3 classroom at the beginning of the school year and due to government testing demands, nearly
impossible to gather data during the second and third terms. When I was able to visit, my role was closer to that of a passive observer, watching and taking notes from a position 'outside' of the lesson.

3.6.4 Case Selection. Most of the data I collected came from the grade 1 and 2a classrooms and so this was the data that I used in my analysis. The results and discussion sections will focus on the teachers and students from these two classrooms. It is important to note, in hindsight, that these two teachers, who scheduled me for the most classroom visits, were the first two teachers who volunteered to participate the year before following my presentation. By agreeing to participate early, they gave me time to volunteer in their classrooms. This may have given them time to become accustomed to a researcher observing and recording. Thus when it came time for me to begin my field work at the beginning of the next school year, we had already moved through a rapport building phase (Howell, 1972).

3.6.5 Reflecting. The teachers and I gave feedback to each other during the observation phases, before meeting to plan the next cycles, and at the start of our meetings. This feedback served to facilitate reflections on the process (Ebbutt, 1985) and provided an opportunity to examine the students’ responses so that we could adapt or modify our practices and determine new instructional focuses.

3.7 Methods of Data Collection

This research followed a formative experiment methodology and with the variation in the teachers’ participation, the data collection and analysis focused on two classrooms. My intent with this paper is to present qualitative data that is rich in detail and offers an example of what is possible within an ordinary elementary classroom.

Data were generated during each of the cycles of planning, acting, observing and reflecting, during which I alternated between participant and observer. My sources of data came from: written field notes and audio recordings of teacher and student interactions in response to the stories that they were studying; samples of students' written (or drawn) responses to activities; informal interviews with students about their reading/writing assignments; recordings of the teachers' discussions during our four group meetings; reflections and interviews with the teachers about our observations of interactions about
stories; and a final focus group meeting. Appendix C lists the categories that initially shaped my classroom observations and Table 5 summarizes the relationships between my research questions and sources of data collection.

Table 5

How Sources of Data Relate to the Research Questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Questions</th>
<th>Sources of Data</th>
<th>Data Collection</th>
<th>Analysis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| How do elementary students interact with and respond to stories by means of literary structures?  
  • How do students use literary structures?  
  • How do student responses change over a school year?  
  • How do student responses differ across grades? | | • Observations, field notes and audio recordings of literary discussions  
  • Samples of student written reading responses  
  • Student interviews  
  • Reflections made with the teacher following observations of reading instruction and activities | • Themes in student responses that emerge from data  
  • Coding of references made to and relations drawn between literary elements  
  • Comparing within and between class responses  
  • Relating responses and interactions to cognitive theory  
  • Changes in responses, observations, teacher reflections  
  • Differences or similarities in responses, observations, teacher reflections |
| How can teachers work with children to analyze how a story is coded to convey meaning?  
  • How are these codes (literary framework) used in the elementary classroom?  
  • What kinds of questions can be developed that might focus students on literary narrative structures??  
  • How do teaching practices and questions vary according to the type of story or type of text (e.g. cultural or media variation)? | | • Observations and reflections/interviews during the teacher-researcher meetings: cycle of planning, action, observation and reflection  
  • Collaborative development of reading questions  
  • Questions and applications developed by teachers from grades 1 and 2  
  • Interview with teachers at the end of study | • Comparison of questions developed across grades  
  • Relating questions to different stories  
  • Comparison of teachers’ instructional practices |

3.7.1 Field notes and observations. Field notes generated data for both of the primary research questions. I audio recorded then transcribed the group meetings with the
teachers and added my reflections on the process. My notes included our analysis of the
story, the questions we developed, questions or concerns from teachers, and their plans for
instruction. While I observed the teachers and students in their classroom, I took notes about
the lessons, activities and student responses. After the teachers and I reflected on these
lessons, I again made notes of our discussions. Along with my field notes, I audio recorded
most teacher lessons and student discussions, which I transcribed later. I gave some of these
transcripts, along with my reflections, to the teachers so they could reflect on their
questioning techniques and on their students’ responses. These transcripts and notes
stimulated discussions, giving us a chance to address any differences in our reflections.

3.7.2 Student work samples. The documents collected for this study included
reading/viewing responses and written work samples primarily from the focus students
throughout the school year. Some work samples were collected from the other students if it
was suggested by the classroom teacher to provide further examples of student responses.

3.7.3 Student interviews. During many observation visits, I conducted informal
interviews with the students within the context of their classroom activities. I asked the
children questions about their assignments—the same kinds of questions that the teachers and
I developed during our planning meetings. These questions focused on narrative structures
within particular stories or between texts. I sometimes responded to questions that students
asked about story patterns. My interactions tended to elicit a verbal response to accompany
student written or illustrated responses. I audio recorded responses for later reflection. I
frequently shared the students’ responses with the classroom teachers at the end of my
observation periods.

3.7.4 Teacher reflections. Following classroom observations, I shared my findings
with the teachers. We talked about the students’ responses and interactions and discussed how
our understandings could be brought to bear on the next teaching steps or our next phase of
planning. I made notes of our discussions and kept records of our email correspondences
regarding students and lessons.

3.7.5 Teacher interviews. At the end of the school year, I conducted a semi-
structured focus group with the five teachers to ask about their experiences learning about
and teaching by means of literary narrative structures. I wanted to ask the teachers questions together, in a group, to allow for their range of perspectives to be heard and developed (Krueger & Casey, 2000). The teachers were also happy to meet one last time to share their experiences. A week before we met, I gave the teachers a list of eight questions (see Appendix D).

3.8 Methods of Data Analysis

My analysis of student response data began deductively, from an existing framework based on the way literature is coded. Then using a grounded theory approach (Strauss & Corbin, 1990), I began noting changes in student responses or teacher questioning. As patterns emerged, inductively, I wrote reflections in my field notes. These processes are described in the following sections.

3.8.1 Data management. The documents that I collected were in the form of written notes, audio recordings, original student work samples and digital photographs. During my fieldwork, I organized my hard copy and digital data files by grade and chronologically, e.g., Grade 1 → October 13 or Grade 2 → October 21. After the school year, when I began the task of transcribing my audio recordings\(^8\), I did so chronologically, moving back and forth between the grade 1 and 2 data, and thus re-experiencing the research journey. As I listened to and transcribed each recorded session, I followed along with my written field notes, inserting and typing these into the transcriptions. I then matched student work samples with their corresponding lesson and filed these chronologically.

3.8.2 Qualitative analysis. Qualitative research is often referred to as 'telling a story', so I decided to make sense of the data by means of some narrative structures that this study was implementing. I approached my data analysis in the same way as the teachers and students analyzed a story. For example, when the students in this study were plotting a story (see Results section), they first read the story to experience it as a whole and then identified and discussed the significant events that shaped the plot. When looking at each event, they could discuss the functional relationships by moving between from small units (e.g., particular details) to increasingly larger units (e.g., events and plot). I approached my data

\(^8\) I transcribed many recordings during the school year to share with the teachers. This served as a way to corroborate my findings.
analysis in a similar way. Once the fieldwork was over and I had experienced the process as a whole, I reread the data to see the details in the story that had unfolded. My process of analysis began with an 'interactive reading' of my data (Dey, 1993). In other words, I read through the data from beginning to end for each grade. Not only did this reading help re-familiarize me with the overall instruction and learning movement within each of the two classes, it also opened up areas to explore in the data. As I read, it became apparent that the data moved through a series of 'events', which centered on the particular stories that each teacher had chosen to use in their instruction. I regrouped all the data according to the focal stories with which the students interacted during my visits (see Table 6).

Table 6

*Data Was Organized Chronologically and by Story Focus*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Story Titles Used to Organize Data</th>
<th>Grade 1</th>
<th>Grade 2a</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Three Billy Goats Gruff</td>
<td>The Gruffalo (Donaldson &amp; Scheffler, 1999)</td>
<td>Mufaro's Beautiful Daughters (Steptoe, 1987)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heckedy Peg (Wood, 201)</td>
<td>The Hungry Giant of the Tundra (Sloat, 1993)</td>
<td>Qalupalik (Papatsie, 2010)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Hungry Giant of the Tundra (Sloat, 1993)</td>
<td>Qalupalik (Papatsie, 2010)</td>
<td>Lost and Found (Jeffers, 2005)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Lion and the Mouse</td>
<td>Dragon Slayer (Kuczera, 2004)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dragon Slayer (Kuczera, 2004)</td>
<td>The Crane Girl (Charles, 1999)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Crane Girl (Charles, 1999)</td>
<td>Qalupalik (Papatsie, 2010)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I read all the data a second time, one story event at a time and one grade at a time, looking at the teachers and students and the significant or changing actions within each classroom lesson, discourse and activity. In the margins of the transcripts, some of the notes I made were about:

- How the students’ comments related to the discourse topic (e.g., extended, expanded, added details, connected to another text, identified structures, categorized plot)
• Significant questions the teacher asked, responses or prompts following student comments, and purpose of questions (e.g., teacher keeps asking until a structural relation is made; teacher uses the student’s word in her next question)
• When students responded to peers
• The purpose of small discourse segments (e.g., student used hero and villain as schema; students predict hero + want with primary needs; students had no problem moving beyond or adjusting their predictions - they were not locked into the idea of villain = big, mean character)
• The types of relations that students made with the narrative structures (e.g., related villain and place; particular form related to universal structure; described helper, related helper to villain function)
• Student thinking (e.g., infer - hero, villain and character; categorized both worlds)

As interesting aspects or changes in the data were noted, I asked myself, “Where have I seen this before?” “Why does this strike me as interesting?” or “Is this significant?” I wrote my responses to these questions on post-it notes and kept them with the corresponding transcripts (e.g., the teacher wants children to make certain relations; this series of questions moves the children from description to relations and functions).

For the lessons with accompanying student writing samples, I made similar notes as above, including ideas about:
• Any thinking or learning that was indicated in each student’s work in relation to the whole class discussion or lesson objective (e.g., student wrote about the change, learned lesson)
• How many student work samples showed similar understandings (e.g., 12/12 wrote about the learned lesson; 6/12 extended the lesson to the mouse)

I also wrote down any questions that came up as I read the data (e.g., Why didn’t the children mention the physical change from cub to lion?).

I read through the grade 1 and 2 data for a third time. The purpose of this reading was to condense the data, note patterns or themes, and highlight dialogue and student work samples. I summarized each lesson on one page or less and indicated the lesson objective, the
concepts taught or emphasized, the key questions asked by the teachers, the focal story of the lesson, the significant thinking or learning changes made by the students, student work samples that best illustrated typical or different ways that students showed their understandings, and significant dialogue interactions that best showed changes in student thinking. To these I added my reflections on how the observations were addressing my research questions and began to identify the ways that this data could be categorized (themes). From hundreds of data pages, I condensed the grade 1 data to 55 pages and the grade 2 data to 47 pages and identified five categories that would help me report on this data. For each category (theme), I reread my condensed data and colour-coded the examples and notes accordingly (see Appendix E for some examples of my data analysis).

3.9 Validity and Reliability

The integrity of my research depended upon careful consideration of the plausible threats to the validity and reliability of my results. Both my methodology and methods had been designed for transferability, consistency, triangulation, and credibility.

3.9.1 External validity. To ensure transferability, Denzin (1970) suggested employing data triangulation involving time, space and persons. My research was triangulated across these three dimensions: i) my data collection measures and practices were repeated throughout the school year, giving this study some consistency over time; ii) my measures were repeated with teachers and students in four classrooms, two of which provided an adequate quantity of data, giving my study some consistency over space; and, iii) my measures were repeated with teachers and students from multi-cultural populations, giving my study some consistency over persons. The teachers who participated in this study showed an interest in the structures of literature but they did not have any background in language (linguistic or literary) study. They and their students represent a typical multi-cultural public school classroom because the school is located in a lower socio-economic area of the city, where community members have a variety of background cultural and social experiences. There can be no question of advantage or homogeneous population influencing the results of my study. Furthermore, I provided “sufficiently rich data for the readers and users of research to determine whether transferability is possible” (Cohen et al., p. 109), thus
ensuring that my research findings will be more likely transferable to classrooms within a wide range of social and economic settings.

### 3.9.2 Concurrent validity

Denzin (1970) identifies the use of more than one method of data collection, for the same objective, as ‘between’ methods triangulation. So that I may be “confident that the data generated are not simply artifacts of one specific method of collection” (Cohen et al., p. 112), I generated data from the following sources:

1) How do elementary students interact with and respond to stories by means of literary structures?
   - student and teacher dialogic interactions
   - student interviews
   - documentation through work samples

2) How can teachers work with children to analyze how a story is coded to convey meaning?
   - observations of classroom literary instruction
   - reflections on student and teacher interactions and responses
   - teacher reflections/interviews

Kirk and Miller (1986) expanded on Denzin’s (1970) methodological triangulation to indicate ways in which time can be used to increase the reliability of research. *Diachronic* reliability can be achieved through the stability of data collection over time, while similar data collected at the same time provides some *synchronic* reliability. My study strives toward reliability in both these ways. By conducting the study over one full school year, I repeated all sources of data collection to achieve a level of diachronic reliability. I collected data from different sources at the same time to address synchronic reliability concerns. Furthermore, the spiral process of planning and reflecting with teachers allowed us to identify any new sources of data and to make use of them to both inform the next planning phrase (research question 2) and the analysis of student responses (research question 1).

My research addressed the typical threat to concurrent validity, the Hawthorn effect—that the presence of an observer may bring about different behaviours from both teachers and students (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2005). Because my research investigated what was
possible, any *increases* in a teacher’s productivity did not adversely affect my study. On the other side, if the teachers had felt nervous or were reluctant to engage fully in the planned teaching, this was lessened through the repetition of classroom visits. The repeated measures over time limited the Hawthorn effect on the students’ academic performances.

3.9.3 **Ecological validity.** My study possesses ecological validity because I did not bring foreign materials into the classroom setting nor did I remove participants from the classrooms. The methods, materials and setting were part of the very same real-life situation that I investigated.

3.9.4 **Investigator reliability.** The spiral process of my research provided the opportunity for collaboration with the teacher-participants. My data were gathered in the classrooms during lessons so I was able to share my observations with the teachers and they shared their reflections with me. Although this did not provide true respondent validation, my discussions with the teachers about student responses and interactions helped to reduce the threat of bias in my interpretation of the data. To increase the reliability of my study, I shared my reflections (theme development) about student work with the classroom teachers, for their reflection and analysis, and tried to ensure they were comfortable enough to question my ideas. As mentioned previously, I gave copies of many of my notes and reflections to the teachers for reliability checks.

3.9.5 **Construct validity.** Constructs are abstract so I needed to clarify what I meant by many of the terms that I use throughout this paper. I searched out the research literature to ‘tease’ out the meanings and ‘operationalized’ many of the terms (see section 2.7.4).

3.10 **Summary of Methodology**

A formative experiment provided an ideal methodological approach to my research. By working collaboratively with teachers, I was able to generate rich data from observations, interviews, reflections and work samples, all embedded within a typical educational context. The teachers I worked with had all been to workshops where I explained how we could approach stories through the relations and functions of literary structures. The teachers shared with me an interest in literature and a concern for the development of their students’ critical thinking.
This study was conducted as a formative experiment to provide flexibility for myself and the teachers to modify the narrative framework intervention and process to suit the dynamics of a classroom environment. I visited each classroom many times over a period of ten months and thus collected an abundant amount of data. As the school year progressed, I noticed patterns and changes in the students’ interactions and responses. These were confirmed by the teachers, and then further observations and data were made, focusing on emerging categories (themes).
4. Results

The goal of this research was to investigate how teachers can build on their students’ experiences of fiction through a study of the fictional narrative structures or codes. The research questions were: 1) How do elementary students interact with and respond to stories by means of these literary structures? 2) How can teachers work with students to analyze how a story is coded to convey meaning?

Five teachers participated in this study, with two of them, Lydia and Aimee, becoming the focus of the data collection and analysis. These two teachers often talked during the school day, however, their classroom organization, instruction and student routines and activities were very different. It was primarily in these two classrooms that I observed and participated in the effects of our literacy framework intervention. I have chosen to present my findings qualitatively to allow the analysis of the effects of our intervention to be combined with a rich description of the classrooms’ events. I aim to present a picture of what is possible in literacy instruction. The results tell the story of how learning and teaching took place over the course of a school year. I approach the learning of students in each class as a whole, supported with evidence from individual student responses, highlighting the core group of ten students selected from each class. I have grouped the students and teachers’ responses into the following categories: Learning with Narrative Concepts, Metaphorical and Symbolic Thinking, The Significance of Story Events, Transferring Structures, and Dialogue.

4.1 Learning with Narrative Concepts in Grade 1

The grade 1 and 2 students were introduced to the different components of narrative structure with simple structure or concept definitions. Over the course of the year, their definitions or meanings of these structures became more refined and the number of elements that they could relate expanded with their story experiences.

4.1.1 Hero, want and villain functions. Ms. Lydia began the first few weeks of September with a study of the *Three Billy Goats Gruff*. With this story, the grade 1 students were introduced to the functions of hero, want/lack, and villain, and the primary needs of food and freedom in relation to what the billy goats wanted. They were given a simple set of relations to define these three functions: the hero wants something but a villain blocks the
way. This served as the basic definition for the Overcoming the Monster plot category, but they were introduced to this name later in the year. Ms. Lydia organized the function cards (visual aids that I provided) to help the students ‘see’ these relationships (see Figure 2).

Figure 2. How the hero, villain and want functions relate to one another. The grade 1 teacher created this chart to help students understand the relationship between hero, want and villain.

The students began to explore these structures through the particular forms that they took in the story. They interchanged the words goats and heroes, troll and villain, and identified that the grass was what the goats wanted. They easily matched grass to the primary need card of food. Later, when the students saw the freedom card, they decided that the goats also needed freedom from the troll, and so decided that this was another want of the story.

When asked to draw pictures and write about the heroes and villains from this story, most of the students’ responses focused on the actions and external appearances of the characters. They did not make many inferences, instead they described what they saw or explicitly heard in the story. In all 11 writing samples, students clearly remembered details about the goat and troll forms of hero and villain, and distinguished between them. In half of the samples, students drew pictures or wrote comments that showed the functional relationships between the hero, want and villain (goat, grass, and troll). As expected, there was a range in the students responses. Some students described what they saw or heard in the story, as in this example from Safia (please note that the students’ writing has not been edited but I have added conventional spellings in italics):
Safia: So up climbed that man (*mean*) ugly troll and the big billy goat butted him with his horns When the troll fell (*fell*) in the water

Other students included some relations, for example:

Than: The big goats butt the troll to the lake. (verbal)

*Itb g wo the br te gs. (Little billy goat went over the bridge to eat grass) (written)*

A few other students repeated the structural relations, for example:

Jay: The billy goats want food by (*but*) the troll is blocking them (written)

Neela: The three-Billy-goats-Mada-it To The grsse! The grsse was yueey. the Troll Fall In The wotre The Three-Goats can Gat The grsse. (*The three billy goats made it to the grass! The grass was yummy. The troll fell in the water. The three goats can eat the grass.*) (written)

The students could identify the structures of ‘hero’ and ‘villain’. Some students were associating the structural terms with the story characters, and others were repeating or describing the functional relations between the heroes, villains and want.

After reading *The Three Beavers Brown* (Stenson & Zammit, 1999), students identified these structures in new forms: just like the troll, the Sasquatch was categorized as a villain; and, just like the goats, the beavers were categorized as heroes. Students began drawing comparisons across texts, by identifying similarities between characters, and other aspects of the stories, based on some inferred relationships rather than perceived physical form, for example, beavers and goats did not look the same, but they functioned in the same way. The students could describe the same functional pattern in two different stories, for example, students commented: “heroes need to move across something to get what they want” (*goats walked across a bridge; beavers swam across a stream*); “the heroes want something” (*goats want grass; beavers want shelter*); and, “the villains want to eat heroes” (*troll and goats; Sasquatch and beavers*).

The students used concepts to talk about the stories—note the structural terms in their statements above. This was the first time they had explored the idea that while a structure

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9 The italics indicate which forms of the structures the students were discussing.
remains fixed, its forms can vary. They explored this further when they composed their own versions of the billy goats story. Ms. Lydia guided the students through an example (model), showing how they might change the forms of hero, villain and want while retaining their functions in the story. All students were able to do so by following a template (see Figure 3).

Figure 3. A grade 1 student’s template for his variation of The Three Billy Goats Gruff story. He called his story “Whale and the Big Bad Shark”. He explained that the hero was a whale who wanted to eat some fish but the shark was in the way.

All students completed the template and drew a plan of their stories, with the setting added in relation to the characters that they chose (see Figure 4).

Figure 4. A grade 1 student’s plan for his Billy Goats story variation. He called his story “The Three Foxes” in which the big, middle and little foxes wanted to get to their lair but the tiger blocked their way. He used an arrow to show that the foxes needed to pass the tiger to get to the lair. Note that his forest setting relates to the heroes and what they want.
All the grade 1 students varied the structures to create a different form of the story. Table 7 shows the variation in the forms used by 11 students in their story plans.

Table 7

Different Structural Forms in Grade 1 Students’ Billy Goat Variations.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hero</th>
<th>Want</th>
<th>Villain</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>zebras</td>
<td>grass</td>
<td>tiger</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>giraffes</td>
<td>leaves/apples</td>
<td>lion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cheetahs</td>
<td>steak</td>
<td>bear</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>wolves</td>
<td>shelter</td>
<td>pig</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>whales</td>
<td>fish</td>
<td>shark</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>foxes</td>
<td>lair</td>
<td>tiger</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bears</td>
<td>house</td>
<td>hunter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pigs</td>
<td>house</td>
<td>wolf</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>wolves</td>
<td>rabbits</td>
<td>bear</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>girls</td>
<td>home</td>
<td>witch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lions</td>
<td>zebras</td>
<td>bigfoot</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Although the students planned their stories with the same functions (hero, want and villain) and plot (hero wants something but a villain blocks the way), none of their stories ‘looked the same’ and no two stories were copies of one another. Two students used a zebra in their stories but did so in two different functional roles. One student used the zebras as the form of the heroes who wanted to eat grass, and the other student used the zebra as the form of the want, the food that the lion-heroes wanted to eat. Another two students made use of wolves and pigs in their stories in contrasting functional roles.

Within a month, the grade 1 students were using the structural concepts to make predictions about new stories they were about to read. With The Boy and the Giants (Moodie, 1993), it was not difficult to predict which characters would function as hero and villain, if only because the students most likely have some knowledge of story giants. However, the students used the relations between the structural concepts to frame this new story, with some expectation that there would be something the same about this and other stories they had read. The grade 1 students could articulate that some of the structures were the same across stories.
By the time they began reading *The Boy and the Giants* (Moodie, 1993), Ms. Lydia had introduced the students to all six primary needs cards as they related to what was wanted or lacking in a story. The students could relate actions and wants to these primary needs. For example, they discussed that Thomas (the hero) cared for an otter by bandaging its leg, and categorized his actions as *health* (they called it “medical aid”) and *love*. When Kate was taken by the giant (villain), the students identified her as the *want* function and categorized this as a lack of the primary need of *love* in the story. They were categorizing different forms as similar want/lack functions (green grass, beaver dam, Kate) and they were further sorting the wants/lacks into primary needs categories (e.g., grass = food; new dam = shelter; Kate = love).

### 4.1.2 Helper function.

Ms. Lydia introduced the helper function in the context of *The Boy and the Giants* (Moodie, 1993). The students began by describing isolated helpful actions within the story but needed guided dialogue to understand helper as having a functional role related to the whole of the story. With prompts from Ms. Lydia, the students began to draw relations between the helpful actions of the eagle and the hero, villain and want concepts with which they were already familiar. They predicted relations between the physical qualities of an eagle and how it might relate to Thomas getting Kate back from the giant. Their predictions served to explore in context how the helper function related to the story as a whole. Over the entire discourse, the students predicted the eagle would function as a helper in various ways:

- Kyran thought that, “eagles have claws” so “it could scratch the giant” and Thomas could “run away” with “the girl”

- Alex, Vithiya, Neela, and Gaby predicted that because the eagle had “wings”, “he could fly to the island [giant’s home]” and Thomas “could fly on his back.” “The eagle could take … the boy … to the giant’s house” or “the eagle is going to pick him [giant] up and throw him into shore.” Then “the boy will save Kate”

- Bao thought the eagle might use its wings to defeat the giant for “the bird will fly around the giants and … when the giant gets dizzy the eagle will scratch the giants”

- Safia suggested that, “the eagle has a sharp beak” to “poke his [the giant] eyes out.”
• Anh thought “the giant might let go of the girl and the eagle flies to get the girl.”
• Alex, Than and Anh predicted that the eagle “has good eyes” that are “sharper to see” so it “can see the castle” “where the giant went.”

Ms. Lydia’s prompts helped the students consider the eagle’s actions in relation to the structures of which they already had developed some understanding. The students carried this relational thinking into their independent writing. In all 12 written and illustrated response samples, students predicted the eagle would be a helper through its relation to Thomas, Kate and the giant (hero, want and villain). They drew other relations as well: one student related the hero to the villain; eight students related the eagle’s actions to fighting or defeating the villain; 11 students showed the eagle flying the hero to the villain’s castle; and 11 students related Kate to the giant or his castle, which was shown as the destination of the eagle. The students had brought the new helper concept into their narrative framework.

In another lesson, Ms. Lydia asked the students to imagine other possible helpers that might show up in the story. Some students thought that the relation of ‘Thomas helped the eagle then the eagle helped Thomas’ might be one example of a pattern, so they predicted that this pattern would be seen with the otter and fish characters whom Thomas also helped. In the class discourse, five students talked about the possibility of the otter functioning in the role of helper, for “it swims” and “can swim a long way” “to the castle” “with Thomas on its back”, and then “slaps giant with tail.” Other students pondered whether the little fish that Thomas helped might later help Thomas. Jacob, however, decided that it could not be a helper for it was “too small to help.” Two students embedded new characters into the story. Bao suggested that a whale might appear as a helper in that, “it makes a wave … with its tail, then the giant drops Kate … and the eagle catches.” She related this new helper to the want, villain and the previous helper. Neela predicted that a reindeer might help as “the hero can sit on its back, then it can stomp the giant.”

Following the class conversation, the students wrote about their helper predictions, as they understood the helper concept. For example, Jay, a lower academic student, discussed his understanding with me:

Researcher: How might the eagle help Thomas?
Jay: To help him get to … to the castle.

Researcher: So you have Thomas and the eagle … and the big giant? (pointing to his illustrations)

Jay: The castle. And the bad guys there … the giant … they’re going home.

Researcher: Will Thomas get back home? How?

Jay: The eagle will fly him back home.

Jay related the eagle’s ability to fly with how it would help Thomas get to the castle but he did not give many details or offer many relations between Thomas (hero) or the giant (villain), and he left out Kate (lack). Other students drew more relations, for example Ariana drew Thomas and Kate, with smiles on their faces, riding on the eagle’s back away from the frowning giant. Her drawing and explanation showed how the helper related to the hero, want and villain (see Figure 5).

Figure 5. Ariana’s prediction of how an eagle might help Thomas. She wrote: The eagle got the girl back and the eagle killed the giant. When Ariana explained her ideas, Ms. Lydia wrote them on the side: The bird made the giant (scratched). The girl came out of his hand. Paws (claws) used to scratch the giant.

Kyran drew many relations when he identified two possible helpers and how they might work together to defeat the giant, and save Kate. He also mentioned the return home by the
hero. Kyran wrote, “The eagle is helping Thomas to get Kate from the giants. And the seal is going to fight the giants. The eagle help to get Kate. Then they go home.”

During the class discussion, only two students thought to embed new characters into the story yet later in the written responses, five students embedded new helpers (e.g., a shark, whale, seal, walrus, octopus, fish and tiger). Nadia included the highest number of functional relationships in her response. Like many other students, she predicted how the eagle might function in the role of helper. She then extended the concept and embedded three additional characters who might appear in the story to help fight the giant who was holding Kate. Nadia further related all three new helpers to the water that surrounded the giant’s castle (setting). All her helpers assisted in a way that was consistent with their physical characteristics (or those she thought they had). She imagined an octopus might poison the giant with its tentacles, a walrus might bite the giant’s leg, and a whale would spray water into the giant’s face. These actions would cause the giant to let go of Kate. As Kate fell, the eagle, with Thomas on his back, would catch her. Nadia explained these connections to Ms. Lydia, who recorded the ideas and excitedly relayed the responses to me (see Figure 6).

Figure 6. Nadia’s illustration predicts how various characters might function as helpers. The teacher wrote Nadia’s comments beside each creature. Nadia independently wrote: the walrus JJYt Bt. (The walrus giant bite)
It is worth noting that Nadia could independently write only a very small aspect of what she had drawn and explained

The students were much quicker to vary the form of helper for this activity then they had been a few weeks before when asked to vary the form of hero. Now, in October, they were identifying *functional* relations between characters. They were also relating how the physical characteristics of the helper forms (e.g., eagle as the form of helper) ‘fit’ within the story. For example, students did not predict that the eagle would help by swimming under water or rowing a boat. Rather it helped by flying or scratching.

### 4.1.3 Contrasting the helper and villain functions. The Boy and the Giants

(Moodie, 1993) presented complexity in two of its characters. The giantess appeared externally to be a villain because she was a giant, was often mean, and was married to the giant. However, her actions were often those of a helper, as she bargained with the Thomas to help him free Kate. In contrast, the sea princess appeared externally to be a helper for she was beautiful, led Thomas to the cave of pearls and offered him food and wine. Her actions, however, were villainous in intent because they were only to trick Thomas into drinking the poison wine, and put him under a spell so he would forget his love.

With prompting, the students were able to use their conceptual understandings of helper and villain to figure out how the sea princess and the giantess functioned. Ms. Lydia asked, “Was [the sea princess] a helper or was she a villain?” As one student responded “villain”, several others nodded in agreement, although they could not explain how she functioned this way. One student attempted to give evidence, by saying, “because she was a sea monster”. The sea princess was indeed a sea monster, but their claim was still not supported by much evidence. How was the sea monster a villain? At this point there was no consensus, nor even a definite decision made by anyone in the class as to whether the sea princess/monster functioned as a helper or villain.

Ms. Lydia attempted to narrow the focus by asking, “How was she like a helper?” She wanted the students to use the concept as a way to think about the character, using the relationships that they already understood. One student now remembered that the sea princess helped Thomas get pearls to trade for Kate’s freedom. Another added that this was
“nice” and helpers are nice. This discussion helped Ahn suddenly realize the contrast between the helper and villain concepts. She said, “She’s a villain ... the princess is the villain because she dressed up as a helper ... she’s in disguises.” By using the helper concept to think about this character, Anh was able to make some sense of this character and how it functioned. She was beginning to realize that the disguise was an attempt to hide villainy from the hero. One other student added that the sea princess’ actions were villainous because she caused the hero to forget what was wanted (the sea princess gave the Thomas a poisonous drink to make him forget Kate).

However, even after Anh shared her idea, the students were divided about how the sea princess related to the whole of the story, specifically the hero and what was wanted. Some still maintained that the sea princess was a helper. Luxman, for example, in the face of some peer opposition, stated that the sea princess was a helper because she “presents the pearls” to the hero. He could see how this one event related to the hero but was not yet able to relate the contrasting aspects of this character. It was true that Thomas needed pearls and the sea princess led him to the cave of pearls but most students could not yet articulate how this connected functionally through the story (e.g., the pearls were needed for Thomas to trade with the giantess for Kate’s freedom). Some students thought the sea princess was a villain, claiming that she was a monster in disguise and therefore could not be a helper. These students remembered and agreed with Anh’s comment but could not articulate the functional implications of the disguise. All in all, the students backed up their claims with some evidence from the story, often with some connection to at least one other function.

A little later, in a similar discussion, the students considered the function of the giantess, another complex character. Although they were again divided in their ideas, they could still each provide relational evidence. They supported their claim of a villain classification with the fact that the giantess wanted to eat Kate. This fit with their understanding that a villain frequently tries to stop heroes by eating them (e.g., The Three Billy Goats Gruff). Evidence that the giantess functioned as a helper focused on the fact that she promised to set Kate free when she received the pearls. This fit with another understanding that a helper helps the hero get what is wanted. Bao further differentiated the
giantess’ helpful actions with those of the hero for Thomas “let the animals go without giving him anything”. This showed that he could discern a difference even between similar actions. The giantess would help but only for something in return.

The following week, the students further explored the function of the sea princess. Ms. Lydia compiled a list of actions, traits and physical descriptions of the sea princess, which the students could easily sort into two groups, one labelled ‘sea princess’ and the other ‘sea monster’. By this means, they could explore the contrasting aspects within the character.

Later when drawing pictures, all the students distinguished between the princess and monster aspects by contrasting bright with dull colours, and by describing an action or event related to each. With this scaffolded lesson, even the lower academic students could describe the sea princess’ intentions as depicted in their drawings, for example:

Sara: A princess … and a monster … he’s [Thomas] scared of drinking it [the enchanted wine offered by the sea princess].

Researcher: What happens when he drinks it?
Sara: He’d miss the real world.
Researcher: What are you going to draw over here?
Luxman: The girl making him drink the wine.

Higher academic students could relate more elements to this character:

Anh: She’s not beautiful. She’s beautiful outside and not inside. She’s putted a mask. I put lipstick on and makeup [on the sea princess in disguise]

Researcher: What did you draw?
Gaby: I draw Thomas drinking wine with the … princess.
Researcher: What did you write?
Gaby: I forgot about Kate … [indicating Thomas’ thoughts]
Researcher: When did that happen?
Gaby: When he drink the wine.
Researcher: How?
Gaby: Made a spell.
Researcher: What are you drawing on the other side?
Gaby: What she [sea princess] really looks on the inside [sea monster].

After the discussion and activity, most of the grade 1 students were able to use the helper and villain concepts to think about contrasting actions within this one character. They could also relate her actions functionally to the hero and what he wanted. This simple sorting activity may have been a step in the development of these narrative concepts and may have served as the foundation for the more metaphorical thinking that emerged later on with the analysis of *Dragon Slayer* (Kuczera, 2004) (see metaphorical thinking section 4.3).

**4.1.4 Underlying structures seen through variation in forms.** Near the end of October, the grade 1 students were using the structures to compare different stories. Together they considered how *The Boy and the Giants* (Moodie, 1993) was similar to a newly read story, *Anna and the Seven Swans* (Silverman, 1984). Their responses contained many references to the structures they understood. They saw how the two heroes, Anna and Thomas, both wanted their loved ones back and how both heroes helped three other characters, who in turn helped them. Both heroes went on adventures and faced the dangerous villains who took their loved ones away.

Independently, the students were more specific in their explanations or illustrations, showing how different forms in both stories were related by a similar structure (function). At their various levels of understanding, all the students were able to work with the narrative structures and the forms they took. Some students could identify the heroes in both stories and related them by their similar actions. For example, Kyran drew the heroes helping other characters in the story. Although the characters of eagle and stove look different, both are being helped by the hero (see Figure 7).
Figure 7. Kyran related the heroes in two stories. He wrote: *Thomas is helping the eagle. He fed the eagle. And set it free. Anna is getting the cherry dumplings out of the stove.*

Other students could see more structural relations in the differing forms. Ariana, for example, identified the hero, want and villain relations in both stories. She identified different forms of hero (e.g., a boy and a girl), villain (giant and swans) and want (girlfriend and brother). Her drawings showed how these three structures related, with the hero watching as a villain carried a loved one away (see Figure 8).
Figure 8. Ariana compared events from two stories. She wrote: Thoma’s Is Hrlying To gaet Kate bac from The Giant. (Thomas is trying to get Kate back from the giant); and, Anna Is Hrlying To gaet Ivan bac from “Baba Yaga” (Anna is trying to get Ivan back from) [“Baba Yaga” was added verbally]

At a higher relational level, some students could relate the two stories not by any similar form (image) but by the similar function. For example, like Kyran (refer back to Figure 7), Kadeen wrote about the relation between the heroes and the eagle and stove characters. However, his response shows that he identified the eagle and stove as helpers in relation to what the heroes wanted. His drawings indicated that he inferred structural similarities between very different forms, actions and events. In one drawing, he showed the eagle helper carrying Thomas toward the giant’s castle where Kate was imprisoned. This showed how the helper helped the hero move toward the villain and want. In the other drawing, he drew the stove helping by hiding Anna from the witch after she escaped with Ivan. This indicated that the helper helped the hero and want functions escape from the villain. Furthermore, Kadeen could see that the actions that revealed the functional relationships between hero, helper, want and villain, occurred at different points in each story. The eagle helped during events in the first move of the story (just after the beginning), whereas the stove helped during an event around the sixth move (close to the end) of the story (see Figure 9).
By the middle of November, most students responded to literary questions using structural concepts and identified the forms of structures in particular stories. To encourage students to think relationally instead of just repeating structural terms, Ms. Lydia typically asked for explanations or elaborations, asked for the particular form of the structures that students mentioned, and asked for textual ideas to support any structural statements. The students were not giving structural responses by rote or memorization for they were able to explain their use of the terms and the form they took in various stories. For example, Kyran used structural terms in a written response, then further explained what forms the structures took in two stories and the actions that led to his decision:

The hero has a helper. The mom got help from the black bird. The bird told the mom how to get to HECKEDY Peg hut. The mom [in another story] gets help from the little goth (goat). the little goth told mom the wolve ate the children

Kyran identified the black bird and little goat as helpers and explained this through examples of the helpers’ actions and relationships to the heroes.
Even when the task was to write about differences in two stories, the students first looked for the underlying similar structures, then considered how the forms of these structures differed. For example, in Figure 10, Ariana explained one way that Heckedy Peg differed from The Wolf and the Seven Little Kids. The two scenarios she compared did indeed look very different: a mother goat cut open a wolf to free her kids, and a mother knocked on a witch’s door then guessed which food items her children had been turned into. However, Ariana choose these two scenarios because they showed different forms and actions for the same underlying structures. In both scenes, the heroes attempted to get what they wanted back from the villains.

Figure 10. Ariana wrote and illustrated how two structurally similar events differed significantly in form. From The Wolf and the Seven Little Kids, she wrote: The Wolf Swold the Kids the mom tok Tam out and The Wolf Jumpt in to the WaiL. From Heckedy Peg, she wrote “HECKEDY PeG was about to eat the Kids and she hrd a nok on the Dor it was the mom you Have to gas Ho i Ho. (The wolf swallowed the kids. The mom took them out and the wolf jumped into the well. Heckedy Peg was about to eat the kids and she heard a knock on the door. It was the mom. “You have to guess who is who.”)

In the other written responses, students identified the different forms of: the heroes giving warnings (about villains); the heroes traveling to different places (move); the villains’
appearances; the villains’ tricks; the villains’ actions; the heroes getting what is wanted from villains; and the defeat of the villains.

In December, the grade 1 students were also using the narrative functions to predict contrasting relationships within new stories. They shared their own ideas about what form a structure might take, sometimes disagreeing with each other, but usually backing up their ideas with evidence from the text. For example, as the teacher began to read the *The Lion and the Mouse* (Aesop), most of the students predicted that the mouse would be the hero and the lion would be the villain, and a few students suggested that both characters might be the heroes. As the story unfolded, they continued to use the functions to ‘re-frame’ the characters and actions:

Teacher: Who do you think the hero is?
Neela: The lion.
Teacher: Why?
Neela: Because he wants something too.
Teacher: What does he want?
Neela: Freedom.

Then, a little further on in the story:

Anh: The mouse is the helper ... because the mouse said, “if you need me, come and tell me.”
Bao: The lion is the helper ... because the lion let the mouse go and then when the little lion needs help the mouse helps him back.”

The students seemed to have no difficulty re-thinking what form the hero, helper or villain might take. They simply responded to new relations in the story.

Students also seemed to think about what their peers said. Even if another student shared a contrasting idea, it was usually given with evidence and this evidence was considered or discussed. For example, in response to one student’s thinking, Ms. Lydia suggested that they all try to consider the lion as the form of hero and the mouse as the helper. This prompted further structural ideas:

Kyran: [If the lion is not the villain] there is no villains in that story?
Teacher: That’s a good question. If the lion is the hero and the mouse is helping the lion get free … then who’s the villain? Kyran is thinking ‘no villain in this story’.

(many students raise their hands)

Kadeen: The cage.

Student: The people.

They re-considered the other elements in the story as a result of this possible categorization of lion as hero.

4.1.5 Relating functions to plot categories. As mentioned previously, Ms Lydia had introduced the students to the hero, want and villain functions with the relationship of ‘hero wants something but the villain blocks the way’. This is the primary relationship of the plot structure Overcoming the Monster (OCTM). By November, the students referred to this plot by name, and had developed a class definition, as indicated in this conversation:

Luxman: Connection … both stories have a villain … they both get knocked out.

Teacher: They get knocked out. That’s why they belong over here with this family of stories. What do we call these stories?

Students: Monster stories.

Devon: Overcoming the monster.

T: What does overcoming mean?

Devon: Knocking down the monsters.

Kyran summarized the plot as “Overcoming the Monster stories gets the monster gets knocked out.” The students were able to see whole stories as another form of this plot structure. They also discussed the different forms that “knocking out” took, categorizing them as removing the villain by “brains” or by “brawn”.

Ms. Lydia used The Lion and the Mouse to help students begin thinking about new plot categories and expand their understanding of some of the functions. Again, she engaged the students in thinking not just about the narrative structures, but with the structures. They approached The Lion and the Mouse thinking that the hero would have to overcome the
villain to get what was wanted. They used the OCTM plot to think about the story relations. The students predicted that the lion, who was much bigger and scarier than the mouse, would be the villain. As they discussed the internal qualities of the lion (e.g., rude, bully) they thought that he resembled more of a villain, but this did not ‘fit’ with the plot category since he was not overcome by the mouse. In addition, his character changed (internally) from beginning to end. The students rethought their predictions and re-categorized the lion as a hero who needed to change (see Figure 11).

![Figure 11](image)

*Figure 11. A grade 1 student indicated the internal change of the hero in *The Lion and the Mouse*. He wrote: The lion is mean because he laughs at little animals. The lion respects other animals and he learns a lesson.*

The students took their ideas about the hero wanting something and expanded it to possibly include an internal change. They were considering two possible wants in this story. They could see that the lion wanted to be free from the cage. With this new idea about the lion, the mouse was now seen to function as a helper. The mouse helped free the lion from the cage. They were also considering that a hero could take the form of a character who might need to learn a lesson.

In January, before watching *Dragon Slayer* (Kuczera, 2004), the grade 1 students used the OCTM plot to predict the functional relations. They initially thought the dragon slayer might be a hero who wanted to save the village and fight the dragon-villains. However, there was a complexity to the function of the characters in this film that the students needed
to think about as the story progressed. After watching the film, the class was divided about whether the story followed the OCTM plot structure. In their discussions, Nadia focused on the significant change in the story from the *world we don’t want* to the *world we want*. This occurred when the relationship between the dragon slayer and dragons changed. Nadia related the two dragons to these two contrasting worlds:

Nadia: Now it’s the world we want.
Teacher: Why?
Nadia: Because he [dragon slayer] killed the [mother dragon] … the mom was evil and the baby is not.

Some students pondered which characters might function as helpers. First, with the baby dragons:

Neela: Somebody helped him [dragon slayer].
Teacher: Who helped him?
Student: Baby dragons. (2 others agreed)
Teacher: And who else helped him?
Student: Oh, the horse. (8 others agreed)
Teacher: How did the horse help?
Nadia: … the horse was carrying him.
Alex: The man started to leave … and the horse stopped him.
Teacher: Why is the horse nudging him?
Student: Telling him to go get the babies.

Some students considered the baby dragons as helpers for they were related to the hero’s change from beginning to end (e.g., he was unhappy slaying dragons then happy taking care of dragons). Nadia’s comment about the horse carrying the dragon slayer was a description of actions that did not extend beyond single events or images. However, Alex’s comment about the horse stopping the dragon slayer from leaving was a functional relation. Alex was considering how this helpful action served the hero in getting what was wanted. Looking at the image sensibly (perceiving the image) and in isolation from the other scenes, a horse stopping its rider from leaving would be more of a hinderance than a help. However, when
this action was related to the “nudge” and the “babies”, and the baby dragons related to the
dragon slayer at the end, this strange behaviour revealed the horse to function as a helper. As
a student articulated, the horse was “telling him to go get the babies”, which in turn led the
slayer to leave behind his unwanted world of slaying dragons to create a wanted world of
caring for dragons (see Figure 12).

Figure 12. The horse would not let the dragon slayer leave in Dragon Slayer (Kuczera, 2004). If the horse’s
actions are viewed in isolation, its actions appear to be anything but helpful to the knight. However, when
related to what the hero wanted, these ‘unhelpful’ actions can be seen in a new way that is related to the whole
story: they served to move the hero closer to getting what he wanted.

4.1.6 Internal change and hidden desire. After many discussions about The Lion
and the Mouse, where the students decided that it was not quite an Overcoming the Monster
plot, Ms. Lydia told them there were other plot categories. They insisted on knowing the
name of the plot where the hero changes. She showed them the card for Redemption. This
was the extent of the conversation and they did not discuss Redemption again until after the
winter holiday. Unexpectedly, after watching Dragon Slayer (Kuczera, 2004), some students
used the Redemption plot to understand the dragon slayer character:

Kadeen: It’s a redemption story.
Teacher: Why do you think it’s a redemption story?
Kadeen: The guy who killed the dragon, the mom dragon ... and then he
became friend with the baby dragons.
Bao: (later) When the man killed the dragon and when he saw the baby
dragon and he, and when, and he threw his shield ... and I think he
quitted killing dragons.
The students were now noticing internal changes in characters and relating these to the overall plot.

The ending scene showed the now adolescent dragon using his fire to help the slayer in his new job as blacksmith. When viewing this scene, students called out:

Anh:  
(suddenly) The babies are like villains!

Devon: So if the baby doesn’t know how to fire with his breath then the hero will help them train [to use their fire].

Nadia: Fix the baby dragons.

Student: Fix, fix, fix.

Student: Ahhh.

Student: Train the dragon.

Student: To be good.

Although the students never categorized the baby dragons as villains (they usually referred to them as either helpers or what was wanted) they used the villain concept to understand more about the relationships. The students related the baby dragons to the mother dragon’s actions at the beginning when she was burning the villages. At the end, the baby dragons were using fire to help make horseshoes not to burn homes, because the hero trained them to be good. The babies did not grow up to be villains. During the above dialogue, even Ms. Lydia took a while to grasp what the students were saying. It seemed at first that Anh was saying the babies are villains, but Devon, Nadia and others understood her to mean the baby dragons were potential villains unless something changed, which it did.

As the Dragon Slayer (Kuczera, 2004) study continued, the students developed their ideas of what the dragon slayer wanted or lacked. In this story, the driving want\(^{10}\) of the story was not fully understood until the ending when all lacks were satisfied. In the students’ previous experiences, the stories tended to identify all the wants at the beginning. Dragon Slayer (Kuczera, 2004) did as well, but it did so subtly and without words. The students initially understood the want to be ‘slaying dragons’ and the dragons were clearly identifiable

\(^{10}\)I am using the term ‘driving want’ to refer to the want that drives the entire plot. In Dragon Slayer (Kuczera, 2004), the dragon slayer initially wants to slay dragons, but when we reach the end, we can see that all along, he really wanted love, family and freedom from the slayer part of himself. With the students, the teachers sometimes referred to this as the ‘hidden want’ of the story.
as villains at the beginning of the story. However, by looking closely at the images and the relationships, the students expanded their initial ideas about the want function. When Ms. Lydia asked the students to confirm their initial predictions, “But I thought he wanted to kill dragons?”, the response was a resounding “Nooooo.” They no longer thought that this was what the knight ‘really’ wanted.

Students began to figure out another layer to the want of the story by moving backwards through the story and contrasting the ending with the beginning. They noted that if the dragon slayer was happy at the end in his new role of blacksmith and father (to the dragons), then he must have wanted these at the beginning. It was then that they connected this to the scene where the knight saw the blacksmith and his son:

Than: He’s thinking, “I want to be a blacksmith too” ... because he’s so tired of killing dragons.

The students thought that the dragon slayer must have been thinking about this ‘hidden’ want in the middle of the story too:

Safia: Maybe when he goes to fight the dragons he thinks about the babies, that they need their family.

Joseph: *(later in discourse)* He wants a son.

Nadia: *(later in discourse)* And then he took care of the babies and he became a blacksmith.

Than: Ooooooh! He got what he wanted!

Teacher: What does he really want?

Bao: He wants a son.

Teacher: A son, a family ... 

Joseph: A blacksmith.

Teacher: A different job.

Than: That’s what I said!

In the *The Lion and the Mouse* story, the students had identified the primary need of freedom “from the cage” as something the lion wanted. The cage was external to the lion.
With *Dragon Slayer* (Kuczera, 2004), the students began to think of the primary need of freedom, or lack of freedom, as something that could be inside the dragon slayer:

Teacher: What do you think [the horse] is thinking?

Safia: Don’t leave the baby dragon.

Luxman: He [horse] wants the [dragon slayer] to take the dragon.

Sara: He needs freedom.

Teacher: Who needs freedom?

Student: The man [dragon slayer].

Student: No he doesn’t.

Teacher: Freedom from what?

Nadia: From slaying dragons!

The dragon slayer was seen as needing to be set free from his own actions.

During another activity on the interactive board, a student moved the helper function card beside an image of the horse. Another student duplicated the helper card and moved it over to the baby dragon image. She was indicating that more than one character functioned in this helper role. The interactive board provided an effective way for the students to move the structural cards around as they thought about different relations. This also helped them ‘see’ what their peers were thinking. For example, students had moved the hero and villain cards beside an image of the dragon slayer to show that they thought the dragon slayer was functioning both as hero and as villain. Others were still unsure how these two concepts could relate in one character, for example:

Nadia: The dragon slayer’s villainous? The dragon slayer is killing dragons.

He’s trying to make the villagers not afraid of dragons.

Devon: *(later in discourse)* How is the dragon slayer a villain ... and the dragon is a villain?

Devon: *(a little later)* He’s the hero too.

Student: He’s being mean.

Student: He’s the hero too.
In February, the grade 1 students began a study of *The Crane Girl* (Charles, 1999). They understood the home function at the beginning typically included some kind of lack or want and they looked for it in this new story. For example, after Ms. Lydia read the first pages of *The Crane Girl* (Charles, 1999), some students commented:

Joseph: … she’s happy with the mom and dad ... but I think something’s wrong.
Teacher: Something is wrong? What’s going to be wrong?
Joseph: The swan ... with the baby ...
Teacher: Something is going to be wrong?
Joseph: With the swan.
Teacher: With the crane?
Student: The crane’s going to take away the baby.

The students expected that the beginning (home) of a story could not be completely happy, and rightly so or there would be no need for a story. In the above dialogue, the students had drawn upon a previous OCTM story, *Anna and the Seven Swans* (Silverman, 1984), where the villainous swans took Ivan. Joseph thought the cranes might function as villains in this story too. However, because *The Crane Girl* (Charles, 1999) did not follow an OCTM plot so, the cranes were reconsidered as possible helper functions, as related to another story:

Safia: It reminds me of *The Giant and the Tundra*.
Teacher: How?
Safia: Because the crane helped the children.
Teacher: Oh, the crane helped the children escape from the giant. Are the cranes helpers here?
Bao: They are. The sun was going down and then ... she [Yoshiko] turned into a crane. I think it was because of the dance.

This led to some students categorizing *The Crane Girl* (Charles, 1999) as a Redemption plot, in their varying degrees of understanding. It was a redemption story because:

Kadeen: She [Yoshiko] goes from sad to happy.
Safia: Because there is no villain in it.
Bao: At the beginning she was sad then when she becomes a crane she is happy. Then when she turned back into a human she was even happier.

The students continued to consider the internal aspects of character and how this could change from beginning to end. For example when Bao attempted to place an image of the first event on the plot line they made, he turned to his classmates to discuss the hero:

Devon: [Yoshiko is] happy. She’s not jealous.
Teacher: Why is it so happy?
Student: Walking on the beach.
Kyran: What if it was half happy and half not happy.
Bao: The dad and mom playing with the baby … but not Yoshiko.
Jay: She is thinking the mom and dad don’t love her anymore.

A student then moved the villain and hero cards over to the image of Yoshiko. But she did not just place them beside each other; rather she overlapped them to form one card that visually showed the two aspects of hero and villain within the one character (see Figure 13).

![Figure 13. A grade 1 student moved the hero and villain cards together to overlap. She did this to show how the one character served as forms of both the hero and villain functions.](image)

Ms. Lydia prompted for clarification:

Teacher: What is villainous here?
Neela: Jealousy.

Most significant was Neela’s identification of “jealousy” as a villain. Because jealousy got in the hero’s way, the students could see it as another form that a villain could take.

Ms. Lydia introduced the word ‘realized’ in relation to the Redemption plot category. The Crane Girl (Charles, 1999) did not have an external villain to overcome. Instead the hero had a problem (jealousy), which was overcome when Yoshiko realized what it was and changed. When the students were asked to contrast the hero’s family at the beginning (home function) with the family at the end (HOME function), ten of the eleven written responses
indicated an internal change in the hero from beginning to end. Than and Neela’s written responses serve as examples:

**Than** (very low in language competencies)

[Problem] Yoshiko Wants to be a baby because she Wants to be with her mom and dad all the time (time). [Realization] At the end She nos (knows) her mom and dad Love her.

**Neela** (very high in language competencies)

[Problem] Yoshiko thinks (thinks) that her mom and dad don’t Love her anymore. [Realization] Yoshiko realizes that her family still Love her.

The students were developing an understanding that Redemption stories are about internal changes in relation to the hero and want functions.

In whole class discourses, the students drew relationships throughout the whole of *The Crane Girl* (Charles, 1999) story, connecting the beginning to the end, and relating the home, hero, lack, villain, helper, move and HOME functions. When independently writing their reading responses, they were not able to connect as many aspects of the story as they could in their discussions but they did show some relational thinking. In response to, “Why are the cranes important?”, the students in all nine samples related the cranes to the hero, and listed the ways they helped. For example, Jacob wrote: “The crans are imoportant because there are tecing Yoshiko how to dacsh (dance) and they fad (feed) her. They terca (teach) her how to fly.” He related character to action, but not to the rest of the story.

Three of the nine students drew a further connection between the cranes and the hero’s family. The cranes functioned as a temporary family, until Yoshiko could be reunited with her real family (revealed to be the driving want). As Safia wrote: “The cranes are important BecaUse they feed her and take her for walks and tretes (treats) her like her Parents and they teach her to dace (dance).” She was able to relate the cranes to the beginning lack of the story.

Bao was able to articulate in writing, many of the relations discussed by the whole class: “The cranes are important because they feed her flies, they teach her how to fly. they play with her. they walk with her. Thats what she wants but she wants to do all toes (these)
thins (things) with her parents insted. the cranes are her parents for now.” He was able to relate the cranes functionally to the the beginning and to the deeper desire of the hero. The other students were able to draw these relations during discussions, but not independently in writing.

Ms. Lydia asked, “What if the cranes did not help Yoshiko”? All students were able to write how this change might affect the hero, responding that she would not survive or she would get eaten on her adventure. A few students specifically mentioned the primary needs, as in this example written by Kyran: “If the cranes did not help her she might get eaten buy a crcher (creature), and she will not have shelter, and no food and no cloth (clothing). and she will be pour (poor).” The students could remove the helper function and see some changes in the hero.

4.1.7 Re-categorizing stories by plot structure. For much of the year, the students explored the Overcoming the Monster and Redemption plot structures. Rather than being limited by these plot structures, the students used them to think about new stories. When they began ‘reading’ Qalupalik (Papatsie, 2010), they used these plot structures to think about possible relations in the story. Some students thought it might have a Redemption plot:

Teacher: Why did Kyran say Redemption?
Bao: Because the boy learned his lesson at the ending. Not to go to the shoreline.

By learning a lesson, Bao thought the boy changed internally, much like the lion (The Lion and the Mouse) and dragon slayer (Dragon Slayer (Kuczera, 2004)). The idea of internal change in a Redemption plot was applied to the character of the boy and his change from ‘not listening’ to ‘listening’ to his elders. Ms. Lydia used this opportunity to introduce the plot category of Innocence to Experience (I→E). She explained this plot as a change when a character understands something that he or she did not understand before. She also explained that it was different from Redemption in that a character in an I→E plot is not villainous at the beginning. Rather the character just does not understand something at the beginning and understands it at the end. With this new plot structure in mind, the students began to re-

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11 This kind of ‘what-if’ question required the students to apply what they know and think about a new possibility.
categorize many of the stories they knew. Ms. Lydia listed 16 story titles on the interactive board. The students moved the titles around and sorted 11 as I→E, one as Redemption, and four as OCTM. The students moved seven stories initially categorized as OCTM into the I→E category. Their discussion included aspects about each story that they had not mentioned in other conversations about those stories. With this new plot and the re-categorization, they began thinking that stories could be structured with more than one plot and they used the new plot to understand more about the stories they thought they already knew. They did not discard all the relationships they previously understood with OCTM or Redemption, nor did they change their minds about their initial categorization. They were thinking with the new plot concept and working through what it meant. This interactive board activity also showed visually how the students were understanding each whole story as different forms of the same plot.

The students’ Qalupalik (Papatsie, 2010) study provided an opportunity to further develop the meaning of the plot structures. In many of their discussions in May, they referenced the plot structures of I→E, the new plot of Quest, and OCTM. For example, they carefully considered whether Qalupalik was overcome. The second last event showed the father (hero) and son (lack) returning home, clearly escaping from Qalupalik. The students identified this event as the HOME function where the hero realized ‘the world we want’. However, there remained one last image of Qalupalik still waiting. Typically in the stories they had read, the OCTM plot had a comedic ending, with the hero defeating the villain. Yet this story presented something new. The villain, Qalupalik, was no longer a threat to the father and boy, but she had not completely disappeared from the story. The students discussed how the villain was “stopped” for the boy because he “learned his lesson” (a combination of OCTM and I→E plots) but the villain continued for other children who have not yet learned the lesson. This story suggested a new complexity to the OCTM structure.

4.2 Learning with Narrative Concepts in Grade 2

When I began observing the grade 2 students in mid-September, they had already been introduced to at least six of the narrative functions (home, hero, lack, villain, helper, and HOME) and the primary needs typically associated with a story’s lack (shelter, food,
clothing, freedom, health, and love). They also associated the lack at the beginning with a ‘world we don’t want’ and the satisfied lack at the end with a ‘world we want’. The students had some understanding for each concept and they were beginning to explore the idea that a fixed narrative structure could vary in its forms.

4.2.1 Fixed structure and variation in form. In the first two weeks of school, the grade 2 students had read *The Three Billy Goats Gruff*, *Hansel and Gretel*, and *Jack and the Beanstalk* (among others) and had discussed the narrative functions within each story. During the first lesson that I observed, the students responded to the question, “How are these stories the same?” They made both formal and structural relations between the three stories. An example of some formal connections would be:

- Student: They [villains] are ugly.
- Student: They [villains] all have mean voices.

Even though the students were simply describing sensory similarities, they had already identified the characters structurally as villains. An example of relations based on functional relationships:

- Trisha: In all these stories, there are villains.
- Student: They [heroes] all got rid of the villain.
- Student: They [heroes] got what they wanted ... the three billy goats gruff got the grass. Hansel and Gretel got the money to buy the bread ... they had more money to buy food.

Maysun even used the particular forms in each story to identify a pattern about heroes overcoming villains (plot structure):

- Maysun: In all those stories, somebody is … the billy goats gruff, the big brother he knocked over the troll. In Hansel and Gretel, the sister pushed the witch in the fire …
- Student: … in the oven.
- Maysun: … the oven, I mean. In Jack and the beanstalk he took an axe and he cut it and the … the monster falls down … so it seems like all of them has … they fall, or get pushed in and they tipped over and stuff.
The grade 2 students identified many *similarities* by describing *differences* in the forms. As the students responded, Ms. Aimee recorded their ideas on a chart, condensing and repeating phrases to help students see the similarity across stories in the movement of the plots. For example, she used the pattern ‘hero-got-want’ as she recorded the students comments. She wrote, “goats got grass”, “children got food and love”, and “Jack and mother got food”. Figure 14 shows the summary of the students’ comparisons.

*Figure 14. Grade 2 students saw similarities across three stories. The teacher recorded student ideas in response to the question, “How are these stories the same?” The students’ initial responses were printed in black and their later structural categorizations were printed in green and blue.*

When their ideas were recorded, Ms. Aimee asked the students to label the structural terms for their observations. The students labelled the heroes (goats, Hansel and Gretel and Jack), the villains (troll, witch and giant), and the lack/want (food and love). Earlier in the year than
the grade 1 students, these students could see different forms of the same structure across stories.

When another student responded, “In all these stories there are villains”, Ms. Aimee prompted the students to explain how they knew that particular characters were villains. The students provided reasons, identified several characters as villains and developed a description of a villain that could apply to all the forms they knew. For example, they listed several features or characteristics, such as, “they are ugly”, “wanted to eat the heroes”, “the monsters have mean voices”, “they roared”, “they were always grumpy”, and “they are doing it back [harming] to the people who never did it to them”. However, like the grade 1 students, their list at the beginning of the year tended to focus on physical features and actions.

By the end of September, the grade 2 students could infer traits about characters from their actions. The students contrasted the hero and villain functions from *The Boy and the Giants* (Moodie, 1993). For the hero (Thomas) they listed 12 inferred internal traits and no external descriptions or actions. For the villain (the giant) they listed seven inferred traits and two external descriptions. Perhaps the students did not list actions because they had already inferred traits from the actions. For example, Thomas took care of injured animals, so the students listed hero characteristics as “careful”, “gentle” and “compassionate”. Their inferred descriptions of Thomas contrasted with those that they inferred about the giant: Thomas was “nice”, “loving”, “polite” and “agreeable”, whereas the giant was “mean”, “selfish”, “rude” and “angry”. In this first month of school, the grade 2 students expanded their meaning of the hero and villain concepts, relying less on external physical descriptions and focusing more on internal character descriptions. In another month, the students were comfortably using the word ‘villainous’ to discuss characters who functioned as a villain but did not look like a typical ‘monster’.

As October drew to an end, the students worked in small groups to compare *The Boy and the Giants* (Moodie, 1993) to any other story that they had read. They organized their ideas with Venn diagrams. Each group chose a story, which resulted in *The Boy and the Giants* (Moodie, 1993) being compared to the books *Jack and the Beanstalk*, *The Three Billy Goats Gruff*, and *Hansel and Gretel*, and to the movie *Legends of the Guardians*.
(Nalbandian, 2010). Across the five groups, students wrote a total of 25 statements about similarities. In 76% of these statements, the students explicitly wrote narrative structural terms, such as, “in each story they have lack, move, hero, villain, helpers, and advise (advise)” and “the hero overcame the villain”.

The remaining 24% of the responses were about a similar looking event or description of the characters, such as, “poor at the beginning” and “both giants wives helped Thomas and Jack”.

However, the most interesting aspect of these Venn diagram responses was observed in the statements of difference. The students altogether wrote 41 statements that they organized on the charts in pairs, and one group of three. All these statements of difference were inferred from a structural similarity. In 6 of the 18 pairs (33%) students described a function, for example, “Thomas is older” versus “Jack is younger” and “they lived in an Island” versus “Jack lived in a village”. These statements described the differences between the heroes. To write these, the students must first have identified the characters as functioning the same way in the story, then looked for a difference in their forms. In the other 12 pairs (66%), students described the different forms that a similar function took. For example, “Kate needs freedom. Thomas needs Kate” and “Jack needs food” showed the different forms of the lack and hero functions. Another example was, “In this story the villain is a Giant, the sea monster” and “and this story has a troll”, where the students used the structural terms and identified the different forms. With this activity, the students showed that they could understand the underlying structures through the particular story variations, and that they could categorize different forms as the same structure. Students listed the structures, common to both stories, in the centre of the Venn diagram and listed the forms of the structures, particular to each story, in the circles to the right and left (see figure 15).
Figure 15. A sample of a grade 2 group’s Venn diagram comparing a book to a movie. In the left circle for *The Boy and the Giants* (Moodie, 1993), students wrote: has two villains; has a giant and a sea princess; Thomas has to overcome the sea princess; Thomas finds the sea princess. *Both* (intersection of circles): they both have villains; they both have helpers; they both move on; they both fix the problem; they both have happy endings; they both have heroes; they both have lacks. In the right circle for the *Legends of the Guardians* (Nalbandian, 2010), students wrote: has one villain; has King of Titans; Soren has to overcome the King of Titans; Soren finds Guardians.

The students used the narrative concepts to make predictions about story relations, which they even applied to image on the cover of a text. Mufaro’s Beautiful Daughters (Steptoe, 1987) serves as an example (see Figure 16).

Figure 16. The front and back cover of *Mufaro’s Beautiful Daughters* (Steptoe, 1987). The cover shows the hero, Nyasha, in the background, behind her sister, Manyara.
The students predicted that the girl in the forefront, Manyara, might be the villain, and the girl in the background, Nyasha, might be the hero. They supported their predictions by drawing relations to other stories they had read, and the contrasts of the concepts hero and villain. They related Nyasha to other heroes, such as:

- Thomas from *The Boy and the Giants* (Moodie, 1993) because “she likes to be around nature”
- Soren from *Legends of the Guardians* (Nalbandian, 2010) because “Soren is the one who does all the good work”
- Simba from *The Lion King* (Hahn, 1994) because “they [Simba and Star] both fight”
- the little bulldozer from *Little Bulldozer* (Randell, 1995) because he too “is lacking something”
- minnows from the poem *I Stood Tip-Toe Upon a Little Hill* (Keats, 1863)

The students identified this range of characters as the ‘same’ even though their outward appearances were very different. An African girl, a Scottish boy, an owl, a lion, a bulldozer and a minnow were forms of the same structure.

In turn, the students identified Manyara with other villains, such as:

- the giant from *The Boy and the Giants* (Moodie, 1993) for “she don’t care about nature” “she only cares about herself” and “she has the mirror and must be saying ‘I like myself’” [indicating a self-centered thought]
- the sea monster from *The Boy and the Giants* (Moodie, 1993) because of her posture “when she was like this [displayed] on the rocks”
- the step-mother from *Sleeping Beauty* because she might also be saying “mirror, mirror on the wall, who’s the beautifulest of all”
- Kludd from *Legends of the Guardians* (Nalbandian, 2010) because “she wants to be queen” and “Kludd is the one who is greedy and selfish … and mean”
- Star from *The Lion King* (Hahn, 1994)
- the fire engine from *Little Bulldozer* (Randell, 1995) because he also “doesn’t look too happy”
• the troll from the poem *The Troll* (David, 2007) because he is “mean and has always a bad temper” and that “is how [Manyara] would be”

Again, students could see the universal structure of villain in the forms of a girl, a giant, a sea monster, a woman, an owl, a lion, a fire engine and a troll. In addition, they drew upon various forms of texts (stories and poems) and media (print and video), many of which they had experienced outside of school.

**4.2.2 Changing functional relationships.** Ms. Aimee commented that through the year, the students “moved from simply identifying functions and needs, to identifying and explaining how that particular function or need related to the story as a whole.” Even early in the year, the students explored possible relational changes in stories. Ms. Aimee frequently posed ‘what-if’ questions to encourage relational thinking. She asked students to consider how one functional change would affect the other functions and elements throughout the whole story. For example, as a group they discussed *The Boy and the Giants* (Moodie, 1993), considering “What if Thomas refused the drink that the Princess had offered him?” Together they figured out how this one change affected the hero, the villains, the helper and the lack. Each of their responses related one function to another, as seen in some of their discussed ideas (the italics indicate which function they were discussing):

- The giant’s wife would get the pearls sooner. (*hero* and *villain*)
- The wouldn’t be under a spell. (*hero* and *villain*)
- The would remember why he is there. (*hero* and *lack*)
- The salmon may not have come, the otter may have come back. (*helper* and *hero*)
- The princess would show her monster form and force Thomas to take a drink. (*villain* and *hero*)
- Kate has a better chance of being freed from the giant. (*villain* and *lack*)
- The great salmon wouldn’t have to remind Thomas about Kate, he would just help him get back to the surface. (*helper, move* and *hero*)

When asked to independently record their response to this question, some students wrote of a small effect on the immediate relationship between the hero and villain, in that if Thomas refused the sea princess’ drink, “the princess would have showed the monster form
of her and force thomas to drink”. This indicated a small change in the actions of the villain, which would *not* affect any other aspect of the story. The remaining events would continue as they did. Other students wrote about a change that *would* affect subsequent events but they did not elaborate. As an example, Nina wrote, “If Thomas refused to take a sip of the drink that the princess had offered him then he wouldn’t be under a spell”. Further significant aspects of the story would also change, but Nina did not elaborate.

A few students were able to relate this hero-change to the villains and the lack functions. For example, Kaanan wrote, “Thomas wouldn’t be under any spell at all thomas would remember why he’s there and Kate has a beter chance of being free from the giant”. Mahirah related the helper, hero and villain functions: “Or the samon (*salmon*) would just get tomus (*Thomas*) and tumas needs the pearls to give it to the giants wife”. And Cara concluded by relating the hero to the helper, villain and lack functions: “If Thomas refused to take a sip of the drink That the princess had Offered him then he Will remember The Otter’s Warning and he would remember why he is there to get the pearls also and he bring the pearls to the giants wife to free Kate”. These examples show how some students attempted to draw relations, function to function, almost to the end of the story.

When Maysun responded to the change in the hero, she wrote of five different connected effects that might occur. However, of her ideas, four were inaccurate. For example, one of her ideas was “If Thomas refused to take a sip of the drink that the princess had offered him, the prensa (*princess*) will be maring (*marrying*) thomas.” This does not make sense because it was the drink that caused Thomas forget he loved Kate and nearly marry the sea princess. A refusal of the drink would not have led to the marriage, as Maysun suggested, but rather a quicker escape from the marriage. Although Maysun’s understanding of the functional relationships was confused, her five responses were an attempt to relate all aspects of the story. She understood that the functions in the story related but she was not sure how. She was, however, engaged in relational thinking. This ‘what-if’ question provided the students an opportunity to think about how the parts of the story related to form the whole. By removing one part, the other parts had to change in how they related to one other. The
‘what-if’ question also helped the Ms. Aimee assess how the students were thinking and whether they understood the text.

A few days later, the students worked in small groups to respond to another ‘what-if’ question (this time without the whole group dialogue). In response to, “What if the giant’s wife did not keep her promise?” Maysun now related several functions to the proposed change. She used the function cards to explain her thinking, moving and layering the cards as she explained the changes that would occur. First, she laid out some of the function cards in this order: home, hero, want/lack, helper, villain and HOME (see Figure 17).

![Figure 17](image-url) Maysun used the function cards to show her thinking. She laid out some of the cards to help her think about relationships in *The Boy and the Giants* (Moodie, 1993)

Each time Maysun explained a change that would occur if the giant’s wife broke her promise, she removed the corresponding function card. Her thinking was as follows: a) “the giantess would have her pearls” so she removed the want card; b) “the giants would eat Thomas and Kate” so she removed the hero and home cards; c) “the giants would eat the helpers too” so she removed the helper card. As she looked at the remaining cards, she concluded that the “giants would have the home” (see Figure 18).

![Figure 18](image-url) The remaining narrative function cards show Maysun’s thinking process and conclusion: only the villain was left at the end.

This time, Maysun’s relations were much more accurate in their details. Perhaps using the physical cards helped her thinking. Around this time, Ms. Aimee asked me to make copies of the narrative function cards for all the students to use. She observed that, “the actual cards
themselves, the visual cues, were very helpful. They [students] were seeking them out on their own.”

With this activity, other students wrote responses that listed the immediate consequences of the giantess change. For example, if the giantess broke her promise “she might keep Thomas and Kate in the cellar and lock the door until the giant comes home” or “Then the giant gona (is going to) eat Kate”. Others embedded another helper function, for example, “they [Thomas and Kate] would need another helper like a mouse to free them”.

Some students began to notice that if a character’s action changed, then its function in the story (structural role) might also change, such as, “If the giant’s wife did not keep the promise the giant’s wife will be a vailin (villain).”

4.2.3 Contrasting the hero and villain functions. *Mufaro’s Beautiful Daughters* (Steptoe, 1987) presented two characters in contrast to one another. The students considered the point of view of each sister using the hero function. They considered ‘what-if Nyasha was the hero’ and followed her journey to get what she wants. Then they re-considered ‘what-if Manyara was the hero’ and investigated what she did to get what was wanted. By using the narrative relations, the students looked at how each character responded to the setting, events and other characters. They did not attempt to make any moral judgments as to the ‘goodness’ or ‘badness’ of each character. Instead they compared how the different traits and behaviours of each character related to the whole of the plot and the outcome of the story. They concluded that Nyasha could be identified as the hero because she got what was wanted. In addition, she got what she wanted because of her kind and respectful responses to other characters. In contrast, Manyara, who had the same opportunities and met with the same characters as her sister, responded with arrogance and a sense of self-importance, and so she did not obtain what was wanted in the story. Further, she was identified as the villain, because she tried to stop her sister from getting what was wanted. The students used the narrative structures to consider the different perspectives, responses and outcomes of two different characters.

In January, just as with the grade 1 students, the grade 2 students began to see the form of hero and villain in one character. Before watching *Dragon Slayer* (Kuczera, 2004),
they made predictions with the narrative structures. Immediately after watching the film, they completely re-categorized the dragon slayer as a villain, as expressed by these students:

Maysun: The dragon slayer is the villain … the dragons … he’s killing the mother.

Oma: I think the dragon slayer is the villain because … the dragon slayer is killing when that’s the problem already.

The students associated the actions of killing as villainous, although Oma took this idea further by noticing that the dragon slayer was attempting to solve a problem with problematic actions. Ms. Aimee asked the students to continue to classify the knight as the hero, and investigate relations around this. They were able to consider what may be ‘villainous’ about the dragon slayer without completely removing the function of hero. Their discussion began to focus on how the dragon slayer might also be a villain. Soon the conversation turned to what the knight (hero) needed to overcome if he were to obtain what was wanted:

Halima: His self.

Teacher: What about himself does he need to overcome? It’s something on the inside.

Student: The killing.

Helen: He needs to change.

Student: His job.

Anna: He realized he wanted a family.

The students were figuring out the contrasts that could occur within a character, including the idea of ‘change’ or ‘movement’ as related to what was desired in the story.

4.2.4 Helper function. With *Dragon Slayer* (Kuczera, 2004), students were also able to develop the idea of helper. Initially they categorized the horse as a helper, yet could not fully explain their reasoning. Some students offered an example of a helpful action, such as the horse carrying the dragon slayer on his back. Faraj gave a very general explanation by saying, “A helper … the horse tells … it doesn’t move … if he [dragon slayer] does something wrong, he [horse] makes it good.” Faraj attempted to explain his understanding of helper, but did not yet fully grasp how a helper relates to the story. It was only through...
further relations, prompted by the teacher, that students began to expand the functional and relational role of the horse as helper, for example:

Helen: Because when he [the horse] saw the baby dragon he forced the knight to go and take care of the baby dragons.

Mahirah: … when the knight was pulling the horse, the horse wouldn’t go … and his eyes was like, sad about the baby dragons.

Teacher: What did he [horse] help him [the dragon slayer] see?

Helen: He helped him to see the baby dragons.

Teacher: What was the lack? What did the horse help him see?

Henry: He’s saying “it’s your chance to get a family.”

Ms. Aimee’s relational prompts around the word ‘see’ helped the students explore the metaphorical meaning of ‘see’ as ‘understand’. They started to relate more of the horse’s actions with the hero and the want, thus expanding what ‘helpful’ means in a story. The scene where “the horse wouldn’t go” carried the functional and relational meaning of “it’s your chance to get a family”.

4.2.5 Contrasting the home and HOME functions. Throughout the year, the grade 2 students explored contrasting relations. They began the year contrasting the beginning home with the ending HOME function. The first home introduced the hero and the want (lack), and the second HOME united the hero with what was wanted (lacking). The depth of their understanding of these two ‘home’ functions was seen in March, when they began reading the novel *The Maestro* (Palmer, 2003). After reading the first chapter (home), the students were asked to imagine the ending (HOME). They did so by contrasting the elements, images and actions described at the beginning. In Table 8, I have taken some of the students’ predictions of the ending (phrases taken from their full paragraphs), and paired them with quotes from the beginning of the novel.
### Table 8

**Grade 2 Students Use Contrast to Predict a Story’s Ending**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quotes from <em>The Maestro</em> (Palmer, 2003)(^a)</th>
<th>Quotes from Contrasted Student Versions(^b)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>There once was a town that was beset by sorrow.</td>
<td>• there once was a town full of joy and happiness.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The sun could not penetrate the gloom.</td>
<td>• the sun was out</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• the brightness of the sun grew the full trees</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They were rain-stained and grim, those buildings, and chilly.</td>
<td>• buildings were tall and strong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• buildings were nice, straight and colourful</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• the building (<em>building</em>) was full of happiness</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>... the people of the town knew only the heaving muscle, the jarring scrape of their shovel blades, the sweating brow.</td>
<td>• jobs they wanted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There was absolutely no music in it.</td>
<td>• lots of music</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• people sang a song</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• they <em>listening</em> (<em>listened</em>) to the music</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• the suite <em>melody</em> (<em>melody</em>) of the music</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There were no children in that town at all ... empty of chatter, laughter, running, swinging, dancing, and all the other things children are fond of doing.</td>
<td>• the children played on the park</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• the children made friends</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• played happily and hummed silently</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The town sat on the edge of a grey river ...</td>
<td>• the river were long and wide and bright</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• the river was flowing by the houses</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• clear blue river that sparkled with sunshine</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>... barren branches of the trees</td>
<td>• trees was straight and lovely trees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• leaves were coulourful</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• The trees are full.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• trees are tall and the leaves are green</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>... for now all we know is that nobody in their right minds would ever want to move there.</td>
<td>• anyone who came there never left because it’s like a <em>vacation</em> (<em>vacation</em>)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• people liked to live in this town</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Everybody beged to come to this town</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• The people wanted to live in the peaceful town</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^a\) The initial situation extends across 12 paragraphs of Chapter 1  
\(^b\) Sentences or phrases taken from paragraphs written by ten grade 2 students

The students contrasted human and natural elements (characters and setting) as well as actions. Although none of the students’ exact “predicted” phases were found in the last chapter of the novel, all the elements described by Palmer (2003) at the beginning of *The Maestro* were in fact described in contrasting ways by the end of the novel. The purpose of this activity was not to ‘correctly’ predict the ending but to ‘de-construct’ how the author
‘constructed’ the story. The students were able to see much of the story in the first few pages. What remained to be uncovered was how the story would get there.

4.2.6 Displacing a narrative. With the Qalupalik (Papatsie, 2010) study, the students worked in groups to explore how the same structure could have different forms. The grade 2 students wrote their own versions of the story by displacing it. First a group of students discussed how the story would change if it were displaced from the Arctic to the desert. Table 9 shows how they related several aspects to a possible change in setting.

Table 9

**Students Displaced a Story’s Setting**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Events or Elements from Qalupalik (Papatsie, 2010)</th>
<th>Students’ Notes Displacing the Story Elements into the Desert</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Angutti, his friend and his dog run to the shoreline</td>
<td>desert, camel, clothes, less water, sand, rocks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inuit leather and fur clothing</td>
<td>cloth, shawl, sandals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Angutti falls in the water</td>
<td>“instead of falling in water, they’re going to fall into quick sand”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>warning “don’t go near the water”</td>
<td>“don’t go to the sandline”, “the quickline”, “the sand will get inside your eyes”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qalupalik looks like the sea</td>
<td>cactus hair, half tornado, it’s filled with sand … mutated with sand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qalupalik keeps the boy in the water</td>
<td>under the sand, lie him in the sand, bury his feet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Igloo</td>
<td>tent, shelter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father (hero) takes kayak to search for son</td>
<td>walk, taxi, rope, camel, crawl, step</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The above example served as a model for the rest of the class. All the grade 2 students chose their own setting in which to displace the Qalupalik (Papatsie, 2010) story. They chose their settings from the geographical regions that were part of the world communities they were studying (social studies curriculum). They chose space, mountains, desert, island, snowy mountain, polar region and lake regions. In nine of the ten samples collected, students related changes in the setting to changes in the home, lack, hero, warning from helper (token), villain, temptation of hero and satisfied Quest plot. A few students included the
‘learning a lesson’ aspect of the Innocence→Experience plot. As Ms. Aimee noted, the structural framework “gave the students the tools with which to analyze and synthesize stories with greater independence.” The students could remember how the narrative functions related in one story and then displace them to create their own versions.

For example, here is an excerpt from the Qalupalik (Papatsie, 2010) narration: “Every parent and elder has warned their children not to go to the shoreline … Qalupalik depends on children to keep her young, her skin green and her hair special. She is half human and half sea-creature.” Here is an example of an excerpt from Mahirah’s Sandupalik:

the father gave the two notty (naughty) boys a warning that “don’t go near the sand line it will be dagerase (dangerous)” But the two incorrigible boys were to incorrigible to listen to there father. Once the father let the two disobedient brothers go outside to play in the osis (oasis). That was good for the two brother because they made a plan to go to the sandline. The sand line was waiting for the 2 brothers because somebody was living there and her name was SANDUPALIK looking as ugly as ever with wet sand for her hair lizerds all over her and her nails are as long as the ears of a fennec fox.

In this paragraph, Mahirah embedded some of her knowledge about deserts (e.g., sand, oasis, lizerds, foxes) and related the change in setting to the helper’s warning, the creation of the lack, the villain, and the villain’s physical appearance. Mahirah’s full story is found in Appendix F.

4.2.7 Re-categorizing stories by plot structure. By the end of the year, the students had an understanding of all six plot categories and used them to describe and to relate stories. They could use one plot to discuss aspects of a story and then use another plot to consider other aspects within the same story. Ms. Aimee noted, “they moved from being satisfied with identifying one major category to challenging themselves to see if more than one category could be applied to the story.” The students used the structures dynamically to make sense of what they were reading. For example, in all nine samples collected, students had articulated why the story Lost and Found (Jeffers, 2005) could be categorized as both Quest and I→E. They provided evidence and identified the particular forms the structures took. Their
evidence was usually stated as a relationship between hero, want and move for the Quest plot and as a change in understanding by the hero or what was learned by the hero for the I→E plot. For example, Kaanan wrote about a characteristic typical of Quest stories, where the hero passes through obstacles, and about the learning that occurred in the hero, as typical in I→E plots:

I know Lost and found is a quest and innocence to experience. I know this is a quest because boy decided to bring the penguin back home to Antartica. also there was obstacles like a long jonerney, small boat to rowed on ba big ocean. Also I know this is a innocence to experience beacause near the end of the story the boy found out the penguin was not lost at all The penguin wanted a friend beacause he was lonley but in the beginning the boy completely sure the penguin was lost.

In her written response, Halima made a new connection to Quest plots through the word “find” and understood that the hero was more experienced at the end of the I→E when he realized something:

Lost and found is a Quest and a innocence to experience Story. I know that it is a Quest because the little boy tried to help the Penguin get back home and you can also know when it is a quest because if you her (hear) the word find in a story you already now that it is a quest. Because in a Quest the hero has to be finding something so when you hear the word find in a story you know that it is a quest. I know that this is a innocence to experiance Story because the little boy thought that the penguin was lost but when he left the penguin at antartica he realized that he was’n lost he was just lonely.

The students also compared *Lost and Found* (Jeffers, 2005) to other stories. They viewed the stories as different forms of the same plot. For example, some students compared *Lost and Found* (Jeffers, 2005) to *The Hunter* (Geraghty, 1994). One is a story about a boy who finds a penguin standing outside his door and sets out to return the penguin to the Antarctic. The other is about a girl living in the African bush, who realizes the horrors of hunting when she returns a baby elephant to the herd. Halima related these stories by means of plot structures. From her passage above, she continued: [*Lost and Found*] “is like the hunter when Jamina
didn’t now what a hunter is then when she saw the dead elaphant she experienced what a
hunter is. The hunter was a Quest because she was trying to help the baby elephant get to his
or her family.”

4.3 Metaphorical and Symbolic Thinking in Grade 1

From September through to June, the grade 1 students moved from describing the
form of a villain by its physical appearance to identifying a villain by its function and
relations in a story. They moved from description to metaphorical thinking. In this section, I
describe the changes in their understanding of the villain concept and the relationship
between the Overcoming the Monster and Redemption plot categories.

4.3.1 Villains defined by appearance. After reading The Three Billy Goats Gruff the
students were easily able to identify the troll as the villain or monster who blocks the goats’
way to grass. They were also able to describe the villain by listing external characteristics
and actions that were given in the text or seen in the pictures. They listed 29 descriptions
about the villain (troll):

External: ugly, horns, big bum, big hands, big, ears, fat, pointy nose, dirty,
messy, hairy, yucky beard, slimy, yellow slimy nails, stinky, stinky feet
and nails, smells bad, stinky breath, sharp yellow teeth, rotten teeth

Actions: lives down under a bridge, flies like him, bib, eat goats, eats raw
animals, blocks the bridge, flies through the and into the water, gets
knocked out of the way at the end

Internal: mean, silly

Of these descriptions, only three (7%) were inferred character traits. Independently, all the
students in the class were able to illustrate, write or verbalize something that distinguished
the villain from the hero. These two written samples show the range of student responses:

Than: itb g wo the br te gs. (Little billy goat went over the bridge to eat
grass)

Jay: The billy goats want food by (but) the troll is blocking them
Than wrote about an action particular to the hero character, which was explicitly stated in the language and illustrations of the book. Jay identified the relationships between the hero, want and villain, using some of the structural language introduced by the teacher.

When the students later planned their billy goats story variation, all students created a form of villain who blocked the hero’s way. All their villains were: different kinds of characters than the heroes; were larger or stronger than heroes; were most often a person or animal that could prey on the hero (for example, no student chose a mouse as a villain blocking a giraffe from getting apples); and, were all animate creatures (for example, no student chose the wind as a villain). In addition, all students chose villains that related to the hero and setting. The students’ story variations showed that they understood the concept of villain in relation to the hero, and that a villain functioned to block the hero’s way to what was wanted.

These relationships were seen again, a couple of weeks later, when the students embedded new villains into The Gruffalo (Donaldson & Scheffler, 1999) story. Again, all the students were able to choose a new form of villain that was larger than the hero (mouse) and one that would sensibly prey on a mouse, for example, bears, wolves, crocodiles and tigers. The students attended to the specific attributes that might make these characters function as villains: large size, sharp teeth, and type of diet, etc. This attention was also observed when they embedded new helpers into The Boy and the Giant (Moodie, 1993) story (see Learning with Narrative Concepts section 4.1.2).

In previous sections, I explained how The Boy and the Giants (Moodie, 1993) contained some complexity in the villainous characters of the giantess and the sea princess. Anh made reference to the tricky nature of a villain when she commented that, “the princess is the villain because she dressed up as a helper ... she’s in disguises.” Later another student added that the villain was “under the disguise”, and we could see that they were still primarily attending to physical characteristics. In their drawings there was a clear physical distinction between the sea princess and the sea monster form of the character. Another student identified the giantess as a villain because she wanted to eat Kate. This relation connected back to the troll, shark and sasquatch characters from previous stories who also
wanted to ‘eat’ the heroes. The students were showing evidence that they defined villains as ‘monsters’ and were articulating the attributes and some relationships that led to this understanding. As a class, they had grouped many characters that took a ‘monster’ form and identified them as villains. Part of this was due to Ms. Lydia’s deliberate choice of stories to read. She initially chose stories that clearly distinguished heroes and villains. The monsters all had physical features in contrast with the hero (and other characters), and the students used these features to identify them as villains. To the students, villains in the OCTM plot structure meant a literal ‘monster’. Only a few students independently referred to the functioning role of these monsters, as blocking the want of the hero.

4.3.2 Villains defined in relation to hero. At the end of October when discussing *Heckedy Peg* (Wood, 2001) and *Nanny Goat and the Seven Little Kids*, the students made these comments about the villains:

- They both [stories] have villains.
- In both stories the villains are smart.
- Both villains want something.
- The villains trick.
- The villain tried to eat the hero.
- Both villains want to eat the children.
- Both villains come to the hero’s house.
- Both villains get into the house.
- Both villains fall in water.
- Both stories have a villain ... they both get knocked out.

The students related the two different stories by the common villain functions, discussing the hero and villain with respect to the relationships in the story and not just by a common physical appearance. The above list of villain similarities might make the stories seem quite similar, but, in fact, the stories are similar only because of the underlying structure.

In their writing, several students were able to identify the common villain structure and articulate how the forms differed. For example, Anh identified the forms of the villain: “IN Heckedy PeG the Villain is a Witch. IN Wolf and the seven Little Kids the Villain is a
wolf”. Joseph wrote about the different ways the villains tricked the children to get into the house (relating the functions of villain and the lack): “Heckedy Peg show the Bag of Gold. And the fox [wolf] show his paw.”

Ariana’s response identified the different ways the heroes retrieved the wants from the villains:

The Wolf Swolod the Kids The omm tok Tam out and the wolf jump into the well. HECKEdy PeG was about to eat the kids and she hrd a nok on hte Dor it was the mom you Have to gas Ho is Ho. (The wolf swallowed the kids. The mom took them out and the wolf jumped into the well. Heckedy Peg was about to eat the kids and she heard a knock on the door. It was the mom. “You have to guess who is who.”)

The grade 1 students’ thinking shifted to now discuss the functional role of a villain.

4.3.3 Villains defined by internal characteristics. An interesting change in thinking was noted when Ms. Lydia asked her students to list the characteristics of monsters/villains. The students produced a list of 19 descriptions, nine of which described external features, three described actions, and six referred to inferred internal characteristics:

- external: ugly, stinky, fat, hairy, humongus, bloody, disgusting, swampy, loud tone of voice
- actions: lurking, hungry, lazy
- internal: evil, scary, not smart, smart, no brains, creepy, weird

In September, when they described the troll (The Three Billy Goats Gruff), the students had listed 30 descriptions, including detailed phrases from the text. Now, in December, as they considered not one villain but a collection of several forms of villain, their overall list decreased to 19 descriptions. However many more of the these were internal characteristics inferred from actions and appearance. The list of attributes for a villain was getting smaller, yet the list of villains that could fit their description was getting larger. Their constructed meaning of the concept was becoming more flexible (with their understanding) and could accommodate more possible forms. They understood that villain could take many different ‘monster’ forms and many forms could be categorized as a villain. The more villains the experienced, the more their concept of villain developed.
4.3.4 Villains defined by their function. In the above lesson, it was also apparent that the students had developed a collective understanding of the OCTM plot. Just as Ms. Lydia was about to move along in the lesson, an unexpected change in thinking occurred. She mentioned that she forgot to add *The Boy and the Giants* (Moodie, 1993) to the class list of OCTM stories. This prompted a student to mention that she had also forgotten to include the story *Sadako* (Coerr, 2002), which they had read together over a month ago (for Remembrance Day). This suggestion surprised Lydia because the story did not contain a monster, so she prompted the students to see if the others agreed and why. The discourse moved in an unforeseen direction:

Student: You forgot Sadako!

Student: Sadako!

Teacher: Oh … wait a second. Is *Sadako* an Overcoming the Monster story?

Students: Yeah.

Students: No.

The students were unsure about categorizing this story as OCTM, and Ms. Lydia continued.

Teacher: Hang on … since you brought it up …. let’s explore that.

Student: A-bomb.

Students: Bomb.

Student: A-bomb.

Student: The monster is the A-bomb.

Student: The bomb is the monster.

Student: The bad guy.

Kadeen: The villain wins in the story.

Teacher: (*slowly*) The villain wins in this story? Who’s the villain in this story?

Kadeen: The A-bomb.

Teacher: The A-bomb? You think the A-bomb is … okay (*unsure*). Any other ideas? Who’s the villain in this story?

Anh: The villain is the bomb … and the hero is Sadako.
The responses of these students were spoken quickly, overlapping each other, and with great excitement. The students’ memory of the Sadako story, their categorization of it as OCTM, and their sudden inclusion of a bomb as a form of villain/monster took Ms. Lydia completely by surprise. Her plan had been to consolidate the students’ learning about the plot structure of OCTM and the relationships between villains and heroes. However, this discourse signaled a significant change in the students’ conceptual understanding. Their idea of villain had suddenly opened up to include an inanimate object. A metal bomb did not fit with the physical descriptions that the students had listed (above) as a monster and villain. It was not hairy, swampy, ugly, etc. It did not even fit with the internal traits and actions of villains that they had listed. However, it did fit the functional and relational understanding that the students had been developing about villains, specifically that a villain blocks the way of a hero and the hero must overcome the monster/villain to get what is wanted. In this unexpected dialogue, several students had used both the plot structural term “monster” and the functional term “villain” in reference to the bomb. They were clearly understanding the bomb to be performing the same functional role as the troll, witch, sasquatch, giant, sea monster and gruffalo from previous stories. Ms. Lydia continued with a few more questions, opening the discussion to relate what the hero, Sadako, wanted and how the bomb not only tried to block her way, but did so successfully (Sadako developed Leukemia from the bomb radiation and soon died). The students identified Sadako as a hero who wanted to be a runner and the bomb as a villain who blocked her way by taking away her health and her ability to run. The bomb was a metaphorical monster.

A little later in December, after reading The Lion and the Mouse, the students decided that the lion might not be the villain, but may be the hero:

Teacher: Why?
Neela: Because he wants something too?
Teacher: What does he want?
Neela: Freedom.

Given this new categorization of the lion as a hero who wants something, Lydia asked her students to think about who might then function as the villain. Following the development of
villain with *Sadako* (Coerr, 2002), several students identified the cage as a villain, because it stopped the lion from having his freedom. Again, the students were seeing an inanimate object functioning as villain because of its relation to the hero and want. Their understanding of villain was becoming more functional and relational and less reliant on physical traits. It is important to note here that the students were still identifying characters or objects that were external to the hero as villains to be overcome.

**4.3.5 Villains defined metaphorically.** As I discussed earlier, Ms. Lydia moved her reading lessons to the interactive whiteboard (IWB) that was installed in her classroom. I created digital images of structural cards and moved them to the IWB for the students to manipulate. We placed the function cards either at the bottom or top of the interactive pages so that students could refer to them during discussions or activities. After viewing *Dragon Slayer* (Kuczera, 2004), Kadeen moved the hero card down to the middle of the board and then moved the lack card beside it. He then slid the villain card in between the two and explained, “the hero wants something ... the villain is blocking the hero from getting what the hero wants” (see Figure 19).

*Figure 19. A grade 1 student arranged the function cards to show their relationship to one another in an OCTM plot. The villain stands between the hero and what is wanted.*

This was the students’ understanding of how the villain relates to the hero and what is wanted and the OCTM plot.

Prompted by Ms. Lydia’s question about the villain/monster in *Dragon Slayer* (Kuczera, 2004), Than drew a new relation that helped develop the entire class’ thinking about villains. The dialogue was as follows:

Teacher: Was there another monster in this story?
Than: Yes.
Teacher: Than says, ‘yes’. Why? Who was the other monster?

Than: The other monster …

Teacher: Who was the other monster?

Than: Him.

Teacher: Him? Wait a minute, I thought he was the hero.

Than: No because the part … he killed dragons.

Teacher: Oh, he was a monster too.

Student: It got knocked out.

Teacher: What in him got knocked out?

Than: His heart!

Student: His shield.

This last student interrupted Than with a literal reference to something being ‘knocked out’, specifically the dragon slayer’s shield, which the slayer had thrown to the ground. The teacher, however, pursued Than’s line of thinking.

Teacher: What do you mean his heart?

Than: He got no family.

Teacher: You think that the dragon slayer was also a monster? What made him a monster?

Than: Because he was killing dragons.

Than seemed to be doing more than re-identifying the dragon slayer from hero to villain. The teacher prompted for a little more explanation:

Teacher: That was pretty monstrous, he’s killing dragons. Did the dragon slayer get knocked out? What got knocked out? Did he get knocked out?

Than: His heart.

Teacher: What part of his heart?

Student: This part.

Than: The bad side.
Than stood up, took the interactive pen and drew a heart on the board. He then divided it in half and coloured one half black and the other half red. He told the class that the dark side is what got ‘knocked out’ of the dragon slayer (see Figure 20).

![Heart](image)

*Figure 20.* Than drew this image to show the two sides of the dragon slayer’s heart. The black side symbolized the “bad side” that was “knocked out”, a term that the grade 1 students used to discuss the Overcoming the Monster plot structure.

Immediately Than’s idea was echoed by several classmates, who called out: “the bad half is done”; “it’s chopped out”; “his heart is broken”; and “cut out the bad part”. A few minutes later, Than concluded, “he has a new heart ... because the heart that he broke ... in bad side turned into a good side” and Devon added, “his heart was broken before and now it’s fixed.”

The students moved from seeing heroes and villains only as separate characters to identifying the attributes of a hero and villain within one character. They were also discerning that a character could change internally from a villain to a hero (or villainous to heroic). It was this idea of internal change, just touched upon with *The Lion and the Mouse*, that Ms. Lydia began to use as a class definition of the Redemption plot: the hero is set free from the villain side of him- or herself.

The students expanded the meaning of both the hero and villain concepts to allow for something inside a character to change. A character may need to overcome an internal quality. After their second viewing of *Dragon Slayer* (Kuczera, 2004), students related the half-heart idea with the plot category of Redemption:

Teacher: Do you remember what kind of story [Kadeen] thinks it is?
Kyran: Redemption story.
Teacher: How is the *Dragon Slayer* a redemption story? Why is it a redemption story?

Neela: Because the *Dragon Slayer* changed, because he doesn’t kill the dragons anymore.

Than: Because he knocks out (*unclear*) ...

Teacher: What did the hero knock out?

Than: His heart.

Teacher: What part of his heart?

Than: The bad side.

Teacher: He knocks out the bad in his heart and then what happens by the end?

Joseph: The little dragons ... came together ... and then the good side of him ...

And Joseph further related the little dragons (what was wanted) to the changes in the dragon slayer.

A week later, the student plotted the *Dragon Slayer* (Kuczera, 2004) events on the interactive whiteboard. As they were plotting, a student reached for the want function card and moved it beside a dragon slayer image near the beginning. He did this to show that the dragon slayer lacked something at the beginning. Another student took both the hero and villain cards and moved them together with the lack beside the dragon slayer. She arranged them to show the OCTM relations of villain blocking the hero from the want. She placed the cards in hero, villain and want order. All the students watched and agreed as this decision was made. Now they did not want to place the villain card over the dragon image, even though only a few days earlier, they had identified the dragon as the villain. With the villain card beside the hero, the grade 1 students were visually showing that all three functions of hero, villain and want related within the one character of the dragon slayer (see Figure 21). When they finished discussing the satisfied lack at the end, Nadia asked, “Can we put an X on it?” She then stood up, took the pen, and crossed out the villain card over the dragon slayer because at the end, he was no longer a villain. As she did this, Than commented, “Half his heart.”
Figure 21. The grade 1 students identified the hero, villain and lack functions related within one character. Nadia then crossed out the villain to show that this character was not a villain at the end. For clarity, I have reconstructed the images the students used on the interactive board. Appendix G contains a photograph of the interactive board after this lesson.

Once the idea of an internal villain took root, the students did not let it go. It emerged again in their discussions about *The Crane Girl* (Charles, 1999):

**Bao:** They are too busy with the baby. And she [Yoshiko] think the mom and dad doesn’t love her anymore. Then she turned jealous.

**Teacher:** Jealous of who?

**Bao:** The baby because the mom and dad are only playing with the baby and they’re not playing with her.

**Devon:** Villain in the way, villain in the way!

**T:** Oh, is there a villain in the way? Someone is saying ‘villain in the way.’ Wait a minute. I thought we said there was no villain in this story.

**Student:** There is.

**Student:** The half card.
Teacher: Who is the villain? Where should the villain card go? The cranes, are they villains?

Devon: Put it next to the hero.

Teacher: Put it next to the hero … is what Devon is suggesting. Where should it go?

Devon: Do a half card. Put a half card.

Teacher: She is both hero and villain. So Yoshiko is the hero …

Neela: … and the villain.

Although the half-hero and half-villain idea began with one student, many students listened and discussed the idea during this and later lessons. Later continuing the above discourse, Neela clarified the form of the villain:

Teacher: What is villainous here?

Neela: Jealousy.

At this point in the discussion, Anh could no longer contain herself. She jumped up and walked over to the interactive whiteboard and began to manipulate the images. She resized the picture of the hero, Yoshiko, and explained:

Anh: When is the beginning, he, the girl, the hero …

Anh moved the hero card over to the image of Yoshiko and continued:

Anh: … when the baby’s come … there’s something inside her.

As she said this, she moved the villain card over to the image of Yoshiko indicating that the villain was moving into the hero. In fact, she did what Devon had previously suggested: she created the “half card” (see Figure 22).

Teacher: Oh, very good. Do you see what Anh has done. Here’s our hero. When the baby comes, there is something inside her that changes … this is where something comes into her … she’s overlapping the hero and villain card … What comes into her?

Anh: The jealousy.
Figure 22. Anh overlapped the hero and villain card above an image of Yoshiko. This showed that the character was the hero but also the villain when jealousy entered her.

However, Anh was not quite done. She continued to tell the story using the function cards:

Anh: When she turns to a girl back, she will be normal … and the jealousy will be gone.

Vithiya: In the end the jealousy goes away.

Anh then pushed the villain card away from the hero card and the image of Yoshiko (see Figure 23).

Figure 23. Anh moved the villain card away from the hero. This showed that, at the end of the story, the jealousy leaves the little girl.
Anh has clearly articulated her thoughts with words, images and symbols. She showed how jealousy entered the hero, Yoshiko, and then left at the end. This was clear enough even for Vithiya, one of the lower academic students to summarize. When Ms. Lydia reiterated “she’s not jealous anymore”, several students responded with “knocked out.” The students applied their OCTM term to the psychological trait that was “knocked out” of the hero so that she could get what was wanted. In this story, Yoshiko wanted to be with her family and could not do so until she dealt with her internal villain, jealousy. The students’ understanding of the villain concept had expanded through metaphorical thinking. They have moved from an understanding of a villain as an external physical monster to external “monstrous” objects to a trait within a character. Jealousy is indeed a monster to be overcome.

4.3.6 Further symbolic thinking in grade 1. Throughout the second and third terms, the grade 1 students moved toward an awareness of metaphorical relations and symbols in stories. Because symbols are not often explicitly identified in stories, the students drew relations between images and the narrative functions to begin inferring symbolic relations. In Dragon Slayer (Kuczer, 2004), a moment occurred that was symbolic of the dragon slayer (hero) leaving his old life behind and embracing his new life. This was seen in a brief moment when he threw his shield away. After watching the film only once, Bao remembered this scene and on his own, suggested the significance of the action: “… and when, and he threw his shield ... and I think he quitted killing dragons.” Ms. Lydia pursued this by going back a few scenes:

Teacher: What do you think he is thinking as he touches those tally marks [on the shield]?  
Kyran: ... I’m going to quit.  
Alex: Throw the shield away.  
Nadia: He thinks that, he wants to stop killing dragons and stop making tallies.

One student may have sown the seed of symbolic thinking, yet several others were able to think about the image’s relations and significance.
On another day, near the end of the class discussion, at Ms. Lydia’s request, I was fast-forwarding *Dragon Slayer* (Kuczera, 2004), when Anh suddenly called out, “That’s what he wanted!” I stopped the film and went back to the image she indicated. It was the image of the dragon slayer reaching upward (see Figure 24).

![Image](image.png)

*Figure 24. One of the final images from Dragon Slayer* (Kuczera, 2004). Anh stopped the film at this image to tell the class that this was an image of what the dragon slayer wanted. The students then identified this as an image of freedom.

Ms. Lydia asked the class about Anh’s enthusiastic outburst:

Teacher: What did he want? What does that look like?

Students: Freedom!

All at once, almost all the students identified this image of the hero with arms outstretched and bathed in gold light as an image of freedom.

Before watching the film *Qalupalik* (Papatsie, 2010), the grade 1 students explored the beneficial and harmful aspects of water. They designed a water creature to symbolize the harmful aspects of water. All students were able express their creatures through the physical qualities of water or other water connections. To guide or develop metaphorical thinking, Ms. Lydia asked the students to create story plans for their own *Qalupalik* (Papatsie, 2010) versions. For this they needed to displace the story to another setting, and design another villain in relation to this new place. With this activity, the teacher also wanted to provide an opportunity to explore the significance of villains as a form of danger. All students chose a
new setting and made attempts to design their villains in relation to the setting. Most students called their creatures by the setting name, for example, “mountain monster”, “tree creature”, and “cave monster”, with a few giving their creatures names from stories or animated shows, such as “vampira” or “fire bird: Motress”. Most students did try to give their villains some characteristics from their chosen setting: tree monsters were living trees or had branch-like arms, volcano monsters breathed fire, and cave creatures were round with very rough rocky spikes.

Over the days when the students worked on their displaced story plans, Ms. Lydia worked ‘time’ relations into their discussions. As she and some students explained to me:

Teacher: When we drew our pictures, we did a lot with the weather. Like in the *Dragon Slayer*, when he's upset and he's not happy it was ...

Student: Rainy.

Student: Stormy.

Ms. Lydia’s intention was to help students begin to draw relations between time and character in stories. Although grade 1 students did not make as many time and place connections as the grade 2 students did, several students transferred some weather relations to the images they drew of each event on their displaced story plot line. Of the 12 collected samples, half the students began their story with a blue day sky, changed it to grey, black or stormy when the villain took and imprisoned a character, then coloured the sky blue again (sometimes with a sun) when the hero rescued the child and returned home (see Figures 25 and 26).
Figure 25. Devon’s plot line clearly shows a weather/time pattern. He illustrated a blue, daytime sky - then stormy, dark skies - then a blue, sunny sky pattern. Note the second last event/image on Devon’s plot line. He coloured the background sky half black and half blue in relation to the father (hero) who had found and rescued his son and was almost HOME.

Figure 26. A close look at two images from the plot line of Alex’s displaced story. Image 1: He coloured the sky sunny and blue in the first event (home) when the boy (lack) had not yet encountered the villain. Image 2: Pictures with the tree creature (villain) were coloured with a dark grey and stormy sky. These also corresponded to a descent on the plot line when the boy was taken by the villain. Image 3: He coloured the last event with a sunny blue sky, when the father (hero) had rescued the boy (lack) from the tree monster (villain) and arrived safely HOME.

Bao explained to the class why he drew three stormy events in succession, giving each one an additional lightning bolt:

Teacher: Bao has one bolt of lightening, two bolts of lightening, three bolts of lightening. Why is there one bolt of lightening at home?

Bao: ‘Cause the kids are ignoring the father's warning.

Teacher: Why are there 2 bolts of lightening over here?
Bao: 'Cause the firebird is coming out of his lair.
Teacher: Why are there 3 bolts over here?
Bao: 'Cause the firebird is grabbed the hero's son.

However, not all the grade 1 students were relating the weather (time) to the hero-villain relationship. One student indicated a chronological change in time across the events: day, evening, night, morning, day, sunset, night. Many students did not give any significance to time.

### 4.4 Metaphorical and Symbolic Thinking in Grade 2

From September through December, the grade 2 students explored functional relationships in stories, their relations to plot structure, and how changes in one function could affect the relationships between the other elements of a story. The students were engaged in an exploration of the relationship between character and setting, specifically the hero and what is wanted and the different moves from beginning to end. In November, as part of their analysis of *Mufaro’s Beautiful Daughters* (Steptoe, 1987), the students had described and contrasted images of the setting, for example, “the bright side is the city”, “this side is above the city and the city is below”, “the other side is the forest”, and “hills and no hills”.

Although one student drew a relation between characters and setting, “and this side is Nyasha’s side ... the light is Nyasha’s side”, Ms. Aimee did not pursue hero-setting relations then.

#### 4.4.1 The significance of setting

In January, Ms. Aimee continued to pursue hero-setting relationships with *Dragon Slayer* (Kuczera, 2004). Because this story was told almost exclusively through images, she intended to explore functional relationships through the images and also explore their significance. After viewing the film several times, Ms. Aimee asked questions specifically to elicit descriptions of the setting and images from the film. She followed the students’ responses with prompts to draw relations between their setting descriptions and the hero. For example, the students gave descriptions of the setting near the beginning of the story when the dragon slayer was in search of dragons (see Figure 27):

Kaanan: A dark stormy desert ... bare.
Student: The trees are bare.
Oma: There are no living things ... dead.

Figure 27. The hero rides through the desert in Dragon Slayer (Kuczera, 2004).

The teacher prompted for relations, “Is there a relationship between the setting and our dragon slayer?” Two students drew the following relations:

Brandon: It looks the same because the relationship is that ... he didn’t look happy and this background is not good because ... lots of bare trees and ... nothing.

Mahirah: He doesn’t know what his problem is and the setting is bare.

These students were touching upon the metaphorical significance of the setting: a meaning which presumably influenced the director’s choice of imagery. The barren desert was a metaphor for the hero and his lack of happiness, a family, and even a lack in knowing what he wanted. In other words, the desert was a metaphor for his ‘sparse’ life. Because we (the teachers and I) had discussed these ideas during our own reading and analysis of the story, Ms. Aimee quickly pursued the student’s use of the word “bare” and expanded upon it. She defined it as “not growing” and then encouraged further discussion with a question about its contrast. She asked, “In a family, what is growing?” The students’ discussion revolved around love, care and the people in a family. For example, Brandon responded: “He was like the desert because there ... only sand dunes ... he feels like it because there’s no love in his heart.” Brandon summarized the class’ discourse involving the metaphorical union of the desert and dragon slayer. This thinking developed from a continued focus on drawing relations. When Ms. Aimee extended “bare” with the contrast “growing”, she was able to
help the students keep the desert setting from the beginning of the film, unified with the end of the story, when the dragon slayer’s life was no longer barren.

The students moved from describing the setting, to inferring the internal state of the hero from his gestures and relations to other characters, to uniting the setting and characters. Once the dragon slayer and desert were seen to be related, the students noticed another ‘clue’ to suggest the union of character and setting.

Teacher: What do you notice on the land?
Faraj: Sand.
Student: I see a bare plants and rocks.
Brandon: See the branches? They are so bare.
Student: This one is crooked.
Student: Pointy.
Student: Prickly.
Student: Spiky.
Teacher: Who might those things be related to?
Nina: The dragon slayer’s clothing! … Armor!

The description of the hero and the description of the setting were associated by their similar forms (see Figure 28).

*Figure 28.* In Dragon Slayer (Kuczera, 2004), the desert setting resembled the hero’s armor.
When re-viewing another part of the story, the students again moved from describing images to considering their significance, this time unprompted:

Student: There’s a dark side and there’s the light side.
Brandon: Could it mean, that, a little bit pink ... the sun is peeking in?
Brandon: It’s helping us understand that something good is coming, because in the end he is going to have the dragons.
Student: Maybe it could be the light is shining, because what he needs is coming closer.

Later on in the discourse, several students described the next setting as the “dragon’s lair” or “den” and how “the rocks there make it dark ... like a cave” (see Figure 29).

![Figure 29. The slayer rode through a tunnel and entered the dragon’s lair.](image)

Again Ms. Aimee asked an open-ended question based on the students’ dialogue: “What do you notice about light and dark?” Nina responded, “In the initial situation, it said there is only one to fight the dragon and that’s what he did. And darkness goes with killing.” Nina was exploring an archetypal relation of darkness and death, which recurs in stories, folklore, and mythology.

### 4.4.2 Moving from description to significance

From September through January, the grade 2 students spent months exploring relationships within and between the structural
elements of stories, including making perceptual or sensory descriptions and inferring internal psychological states. Thinking about the significance of story elements started with simple sensory descriptions and extended through all the relations that could be drawn.

The significance of food in stories was explored in this way. They began with descriptions of how food was used in *Hansel and Gretel*. They were able to identify the uses of food three times (out of four uses that the teachers saw) in the story. They contrasted the uses of food in relation to the heroes and what was wanted, e.g., Hansel and Gretel were hungry. Here are some of the students ideas from the class discussion:

They had their last loaf of bread ... they got their need.

They were the food ... the witch.

Feeding the children food so they would get fat.

… but [stepmother] wanted her way ... food just like the witch.

It helps us grow and it helps to save us need ... to save our lives.

The witch used the candy to ... when she uses candy children are going to come and eat the candy and she will get them.

To catch the children.

Lure!

Capture.

The students’ discussion continued and they considered how the uses of food could be grouped into two contrasting categories. Three students summarized with “Food to make kids grow and healthy”, “You can use food for tricking people and eating”, and “Food for good and evil”.

The students moved their discussions into small groups to consider how food was used and how it was important in *The Boy and the Giants* (Moodie, 1993). In samples of verbal and written responses from 12 students, several ideas were observed:

- Simple descriptions (four students), e.g., "The sea princess gave thomas the drink"
- The hero does not waste food (six students)
- The villain is greedy with food (four students), e.g., "The giant is greedy. the giant doesn't need to eat Kate because he has more than enufe."
• Bad food is disguised to trick the hero (five students), e.g., "The sea monster put putyfull (plentiful) food that Thomas can't find the trueth"

• Food is poison, puts the hero under a spell (seven students), e.g., "The sea princess was ... luring... Thomas for the drink ... for marrying Thomas"

• Improper vs proper use of food (hero eats food vs the villain eats people) (three students), e.g., "The giant is using people as food"

It may be useful to note that the grade 1 students did not approach these kind of discussions about food. They understood that the drink put Thomas under a spell and that the food was disguised at the sea banquet, but their relations did not extend beyond this.

Sometimes their metaphorical thinking surfaced in the discourse only because the Ms. Aimee knew enough about the significance of the imagery to pursue key words used in unexpected statements by the students. As an example, while discussing the helper role of the horse in *Dragon Slayer* (Kuczera, 2004), the students’ focus was drawn to the scene when the horse noticed the baby dragon. Mahirah commented: “When the baby dragon blew fire out ... it’s a new thing.” In our group meeting, the teachers had discussed the symbolic relation of babies to new life or new beginnings, often found in rebirth or redemption plots. So when Mahirah used the word “new” in reference to the baby dragon, the teacher decided to pursue this, first, by exploring precisely what the student meant by “new”, and then encouraging more relations around the newness of babies.

Teacher: What do you mean “it’s a new thing”?

Mahirah: He already saw the dragon slayer killing.

With this comment, Ms. Aimee could see that Mahirah did not mean babies are symbolic of new life. Instead Mahirah was making a sensory observation. The baby dragon was a new visual image introduced into the story—new to the characters and the reader. Ms. Aimee chose to encourage further relational thinking around the baby:

Teacher: What does this baby represent?

Mahirah: It represents a family.

She further asked whether the baby represented the contrast of killing and death (the response was “no”) and then asked students to think about the contrasts:
Brandon: It represents love because babies are always cute.

Student: Living and care.

Student: Maybe at the beginning, the horse did not know that the dragon slayer wanted a family and then when he saw the baby dragon maybe he knew that dragon slayer could have the baby dragon as a family.

By helping the students focus on a particular image and its relation to the hero and his desire, they could begin to explore the significance of the baby, an idea that could be transferred to other stories.

In another example:

Helen: The dragon slayer is drooping ... and his face looks like he is very sad.

Student: ... when he turned back along he drooped.

Halima: He looks really miserable.

Teacher: What else is miserable besides him?

Katherine: The horse

Mahirah: The weather.

She helped the students relate the hero to the weather. Later in the discourse:

Teacher: How do we know they [father and son characters] are NOT part of the misery?

Faraj: ... they’re doing fun stuff with each other.

Student: They are sheltered.

Student: We see a hammer. They’re doing things together.

Maysun: We can see the light.

The students were not necessarily conscious of the fact that light typically symbolizes happiness or understanding (or that babies relate to new life; or rain can be unhappiness), but they were thinking relationally and moving from sensory descriptions to relations about significance.

4.4.3 Abstract and concrete forms. Near the end of the year, with the Qalupalik (Papatsie, 2010) lessons, part of Ms. Aimee’s focus was on the particular concrete and sensory forms that abstract ideas are given in stories. ‘Positive’ human aspects, such as
equity, kindness or life, frequently take form in a helper, whereas ‘negative’ human aspects, such as greed, selfishness, poverty or death, are frequently given shape in the form of a monster or other villain. In Qalupalik, the sea monster was symbolic of the dangers of the sea (in contrast to the life-bringing aspects of the sea) and the life-endangering consequence of not contributing to the life of the community or not heeding the wisdom of experience (elders). Similar to the grade 1’s discussion, the grade 2 students generated a list of the harmful and helpful aspects of water. Ms. Aimee also used the concepts ‘world we want’ and ‘world we don’t want’ to frame her approach to the science curriculum topic. The students inquired into the interrelationship between water and other aspects of the environment and how they create the world we want or don’t want. Then using a poetry template that Ms. Aimee gave them, they each composed poems to personify water. Her intent was that by exploring the various aspects of water, the students would not only see important relationships between human actions and the environment, but also develop their understanding of how these aspects are used or how they function in fiction, and how images of water relate within (and across) stories. Two contrasting stanza’s were:

Water

I am water. You know me
For my streams and creeks
For my cool, beautiful,
Clear rivers
Which relax all.

I am water. You know me
for my turbulent, dirty,
Rushing, rough floods
Which destroy all.

Appendix H shows the poetry template and Mahirah’s complete poem.

The students further explored the dual nature of water by considering how its harmful and destructive aspects might look if it were given form as a creature in a story. The students thought of physical descriptions, such as, wet, smooth, crocodile skin, scaly, wet and gooey,
from parts of water creatures they were familiar with, like sharks, squids, eels, and mantas. They thought a water monster’s hair might be spiky or made of sea snakes or leeches, and the creature’s intentions might be to “to eat your meat”, “grabs hold until you become a ghost”, “have a little talk with the person ... about their behaviour”, or “if they’re lonely they might grab you and then hold you like a baby”. By this means, the students were practicing how metaphors are developed. They continued this metaphorical exploration when they composed displaced *Qalupalik* (Papatsie, 2010) stories, which incorporated the villains they created to be symbolic of the dangerous physical aspects of the desert, arctic, island, mountain or cave settings (see Figure 30).

![Figure 30](image)

*Figure 30.* Three students’ villains, created in relation to settings. They chose these settings for their displaced *Qalupalik* (Papatsie, 2010) stories. A grassy villain from an island community (left); rocky monsters from the mountains (center); and an ice villain from a polar community (right).

4.5 The Significance of Story Events in Grade 1

Ms. Lydia extended the students’ story analyses through plot lines. To plot *The Three Billy Goats Gruff* events, she photocopied images from the book and taped them in mixed order onto a large sheet of chart paper. She asked students to choose the events, one at a time in chronological order and organized them to form a time line. However just before they taped an event in place, she asked if the event was a move ‘up’ for the billy goats or a move ‘down’. Using a concept that the students were already familiar with, she explained that ‘up’ was a move closer to the ‘world we want’ and ‘down’ was a move within or deeper into the ‘world we don’t want’. With prompts, the students were able to consider each event by its relationship to the hero (goats) to what was wanted (grass). Table 10 summarizes how the students classified the movement of each event.
Table 10

*How the Grade 1 Students Metaphorically Categorized ‘The Three Billy Goats Gruff’ Events*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Movement of Image on Plot Line</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>home</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. goats on hill with no grass (home)</td>
<td>neutral (starting point)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>adventure</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. troll under bridge</td>
<td>down</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. little goat begins to cross and meets troll</td>
<td>down</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. little goat crosses to grassy hill</td>
<td>up</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. middle goat begins to cross and meets troll</td>
<td>neutral</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. middle goat crosses to grassy hill</td>
<td>up</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. big goat begins to cross and meets troll</td>
<td>down</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. big goat fights troll</td>
<td>neutral</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. troll falls into water</td>
<td>up</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HOME</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. goats on new hill eating grass</td>
<td>up (higher than starting point)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The students’ final plot line showed both the chronological order of events and their significance. The students plotted the final HOME event, where the goats were eating grass on the new hill, much higher than the first home event, where the goats were standing on the old hill with no grass to eat (see Figure 31).

*Figure 31.* The grade 1 students’ plot line for *The Three Billy Goats Gruff.*
The students also plotted the events for *The Boy and the Giants* (Moodie, 1993). With this plot line, it was clear that the students had not simply memorized an up and down pattern for story events. This story was plotted differently from the events of the previous story. The students related each event to Thomas and his progression toward what was wanted. Again they plotted the final event much higher than all other events (see Figure 32).

*Figure 32*. The grade 1 students’ plot line for *The Boy and the Giants* (Moodie, 1993). Four events (discussed in text) are noted: (a) The giant steals Kate; (b) The giantess catches Thomas trying to free Kate; (c) Thomas dives down into the deep sea; and (d) Thomas is fooled by the sea princess and forgets Kate. Notice that the two largest ‘drops’ in the plot line occur at points (a) and (d).

The grade 1 students considered three events to be significant moves ‘down’ in the story. The first low point (a) occurred when the giant took Kate. Functionally, this was where the villain created the lack or want of the story. Another slightly smaller drop occurred (b) when the giantess caught Thomas in the cellar trying to rescue Kate. This smaller drop was fitting for although Thomas was caught by the giantess (down), he was also offered a deal to gain Kate’s freedom (not so far down). The students considered the third drop (d) to be another very low point in the story. This drop corresponded to both a physical and metaphorical descent in the story: Thomas was *at* the bottom of the sea; and Thomas was poisoned by the sea monster thus forgetting that he loved Kate. However, the event, when Thomas was *diving* down to the bottom of the sea, was plotted by the students as a move ‘up’. Here we could see that the students were considering one event at a time. Although Thomas was physically descending, he was doing this to get the pearls to exchange for Kate’s freedom. He was moving down to move closer to what was wanted.
All the students’ classifications of ‘down’ signified the hero’s distance from his desire/want. They indicated the metaphorical distance of the event from the HOME function, where the want was satisfied. Students were able to think about all these relations. During this second plot activity, the students, on their own, emphasized the relationships of hero and want by moving two events, (a) and (d), much lower than the others. Both plot lines show a typical comedic structure of a descent followed by an ascent, which Ms. Lydia discussed with the students much later in the year.

This metaphorical thinking was seen again when the students plotted *Anna and the Seven Swans* (Silverman, 1984). In this story there were no events where the hero physically moved down, like when Thomas descended to the bottom of the sea. In this story, the students moved the events down on the plot line when the villains appeared. First when the swans stole Ivan (event 3) and again when Anna escaped with Ivan but the swans gave chase (event 9). All other events were considered slow moves ‘up’ (or neutral) as Anna (hero) moved closer to saving her brother (lack). Figure 33 shows how the grade 1 students plotted this story.

![Figure 33. The grade 1 plot line for Anna and the Seven Swans (Silverman, 1984).](image)

The important aspect in these plotting activities, was that the students were discussing the events as they related to the whole of the story, relating the functional concepts to each other, and engaged in critical and metaphorical (higher order) thinking.

When they plotted the *Dragon Slayer* (Kuczera, 2004) events, Ms. Lydia held up an image of the slayer entering the dragon’s lair. The students summarized:
Nadia: He’s going to go kill the mother dragon.
Teacher: He’s moving … what do we call this? It’s so narrow?
Student: Tunnel.
Teacher: He’s going what?
Student: Cave.
Teacher: Into a cave.
Student: Deep down.

Students were now thinking about events as movements up and down, corresponding to close or far from the world that is wanted. Later, Olivia (one of the lowest academic students in this class) went to the interactive board to plot this event but she was unsure about how to move it. She looked to the teacher and her classmates for help.

Teacher: There you go. Let’s think about … is that up for our hero to kill dragons … is that what he really wants to do … or is it a down?

Students: Down!
Olivia: *(moved the image down in plot line)*

Again, the students moved the event down on the plot line, even though this event did not show the hero traveling downward but instead riding his horse through a tunnel between rocks. The significance of this event corresponds to the same movements of Thomas down to the bottom of the sea or the movement of Anna entering into the forest. These were all moves into a dark place where the hero was far from his or her desire. Notice Ms. Lydia is emphasizing “what he really wants to do” instead of “killing”. In another story, slaying the dragon may be considered a move up if the dragon was a monster that must be overcome.

The students used the ‘up’ and ‘down’ relations to understand more about the stories. They discussed the significance of events, and offered evidence for moving an event either up or down or keeping it neutral. Again, it was the dialogue and thinking that the structures helped facilitate.

Individually, the students varied in how they understood the significance of events. For example, Vithiya, a lower academic student, moved a *Crane Girl* (Charles, 1999) event down on the plot line. It was unclear if she did so because the fish would not help the hero or
because the image showed the fish physically ‘down’ under the water. She only responded “they were down”. However she was attentive when Alex took the next event and also moved it down. This event showed the monkeys also refusing to help the hero, much like the fish, but in this image, the monkeys were up in the trees. Olivia moved another event ‘down’ because the hero’s family was “telling a sad story” about their lost daughter. This showed that Olivia was beginning to relate sadness to ‘down’, but she could not clearly articulate how this event related to other events or what the hero wanted. Although Olivia was not able to draw as many relations as other students, Ms. Lydia was easily able to prompt for more relations from the other students.

Near the end of the year, Devon asked and answered his own question about the metaphorical plot movement in stories: “What if we continue the world we don’t want? (he pause) It would go down, down, down, down, down, down, down.” Here he expressed his understanding that “down, down, down” is symbolic of the hero failing to get what is wanted.

4.6 The Significance of Story Events in Grade 2

During the first term, the grade 2 students also plotted events by their significance. For the first few stories they plotted, Ms. Aimee photocopied event images so the students could physically position them chronologically and move them up or down relative to the HOME function. Figure 34 shows their plot line for *The Boy and the Giants* (Moodie, 1993), with four events noted.

![Figure 34. The grade 2 plot line for *The Boy and the Giants* (Moodie, 1993). I labelled four events: (a) The giant steals Kate; (b) The giantess catches Thomas trying to free Kate; (c) Thomas dives down to the bottom of the sea; and (d) Thomas is fooled by the sea princess and forgets Kate.](image-url)
The grade 2 students understood the significance of events in much the same way as the grade 1 students. They did not plot events based on the physical movements of the hero but in relation to the metaphorical distance of the hero from satisfying the lacks of the story. Overall both grades identified the same down-up comedic movement in *The Boy and the Giants* (Moodie, 1993). The only slight difference was seen at point (b) of Figure 34. Here the grade 2 students did not drop the events, as the grade 1 students did, but left them neutral. These events correspond to when the giantess caught Thomas in the cellar trying to rescue Kate yet offered him a deal. The grade 2 students balanced ‘getting caught’ with ‘being offered a deal for freedom’. Other very slight grade differences could be seen between how the students plotted each event. These indicate that the students were not copying a template but discussing the meaning of each event. Table 11 shows the similarities and differences between how the grade 1 and 2 students plotted the story’s events.

### Table 11

**Differences Between How the Grade 1 and Grade 2 Students Plotted Events**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Grade 1</th>
<th>Grade 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>home</td>
<td>starting point</td>
<td>starting point</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thomas lives with Kate (home)</td>
<td>starting point</td>
<td>starting point</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>adventure</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Giant steals Kate</td>
<td>down</td>
<td>down</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eagle flies Thomas to the Giant’s castle</td>
<td>up</td>
<td>up</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thomas finds Kate in cellar</td>
<td>up</td>
<td>neutral</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Giantess catches Thomas &amp; offers deal</td>
<td>down</td>
<td>neutral</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Otter swims Thomas to bottom of sea</td>
<td>up</td>
<td>up</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thomas is at the bottom of the sea</td>
<td>neutral</td>
<td>neutral</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Princess shows Thomas the cave of pearls</td>
<td>up</td>
<td>neutral</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sea Princess gives Thomas the drink</td>
<td>down</td>
<td>down</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The salmon has a plan</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>up</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The salmon helps break the spell</td>
<td>up</td>
<td>up</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salmon brings Thomas to surface</td>
<td>up</td>
<td>up</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thomas gives Giantess the pearls</td>
<td>up</td>
<td>up</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HOME</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thomas and Kate go home</td>
<td>up</td>
<td>up</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Giants are never seen again</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>up</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Ms. Aimee further asked the students to consider how the setting related to the actions of the story. Going beyond the grade 1 analysis, the grade 2 students labeled their plot line with phrases to describe the settings and verbs to describe the significant actions. This activity was used to help the students begin to think about how the setting related to the characters and their actions, which was more fully and metaphorically explored in depth with *Dragon Slayer* (Kuczera, 2004). I took the students’ analysis from their plot line (Figure 34) and organized it onto Table 12. I also added a column to show which characters (functions) relate to each action and a column to show the corresponding metaphorical up or down movement.

Table 12

*Grade 2 Students Related Setting, Action and Characters in a Story*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event Setting (place)</th>
<th>Action (verb)</th>
<th>Narrative Functions involved in actions (italicized character performs the action)</th>
<th>Plot</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>on an island</td>
<td>love, heal, free, create, capture, steal</td>
<td>hero, want, helper, helper, helper, helper, helper, want</td>
<td>neutral</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>hero, want, villain, hero, want, villain</td>
<td>down</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>at the castle on the high cliff</td>
<td>assist, search, fly, find</td>
<td>hero, helper, helper, helper, helper, hero, want</td>
<td>up</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>at the castle on the high cliff</td>
<td>imprison</td>
<td>hero, want</td>
<td>neutral</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in the cold cellar</td>
<td>bargain</td>
<td>hero, want, helper/villain</td>
<td>neutral</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>down into the deep sea</td>
<td>assist, advise, dive</td>
<td>hero, helper, helper, helper, helper</td>
<td>up</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>at the sea kingdom</td>
<td>trap</td>
<td>hero, villain</td>
<td>neutral</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>at the cave of pearls</td>
<td>disguise, poison, forget</td>
<td>hero, villain, hero, want, villain</td>
<td>down</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Although some of the verbs were used by the author in the story, the students came to a consensus in their discussion about which verbs best captured the significant action at each event. The verbs capture, steal, poison and forget were all associated with keeping the hero from what he wanted. The actions of assist, search, fly, find, advise, dive, plan, remember, realize, see, swim, escape, fulfill, live and love were all associated with the hero moving closer to what he wanted. Imprison and bargain were actions by the villain and offset each other, leading to the neutral plotting move by the students. Assist and plan were the actions of the helper. The verb disappear correlated to an up movement to indicate that all lacks were satisfied, because it was the villain who had disappeared. The grade 2 students did not take individual words or actions out of context: they considered how actions related to the characters and their relation to the overall movement of the story.

When the grade 2 students were reading Mufaro’s Beautiful Daughters (Steptoe, 1987), they used the plot line as a way of thinking from different perspectives. Ms. Aimee asked the students “What if we plot the events for each sister?” To do this, they thought about each sister, Nyasha and Manyara, in relation to obtaining what was wanted in the story—to become queen. They plotted the events first from the perspective (point of view) of Nyasha and then Manyara. The events for Manyara were plotted in line vertically with the corresponding events for Nyasha (see Figure 35).
Figure 35. The grade 2 students plotted the same events from two perspectives. From *Mufaro’s Beautiful Daughters* (Steptoe, 1987), they plotted the events once from Nyasha’s perspective (in yellow), and then again from Manyara’s perspective (blue).

Both Nyasha and Manyara began their journey from the same physical place, at home with their father. However, the students showed each character’s story as beginning in very different *metaphorical* places. They placed Manyara’s first event higher than Nyasha’s. Their decision was based on the attitudes and traits of both characters, as seen from the point of view of that character. Manyara told others that she should be queen and considered herself to be better than her sister. Whereas Nyasha was humble, cared for others, and did not think of becoming queen. The quality of character influenced how each sister responded to similar situations within the story, and thus influenced how the students plotted each event. Nyasha passed all the tests along the way, moving her closer and metaphorically up toward the goal. Manyara in contrast failed the tests, moving her farther and metaphorically down, away from the goal. The students were able to use the plot line and think metaphorically about the significance of each event from the perspective of two different characters. The plot lines formed overlapping comedic and tragic patterns.
4.7 Transferring Concepts in Grade 1

For the students to work with the narrative concepts, they needed to transfer them from story to story. The previous sections that I discussed showed ample evidence that the students were doing just this. However, a few instances can be highlighted here.

Ms. Lydia frequently asked her students to look for resemblances in the stories they were reading together. Sometimes she “paired” a story with a displaced variation, to help the students transfer concepts. Her intent was for the students to explore the structural similarities in stories and the particular forms those structures took. For example she paired *The Three Billy Goats Gruff* with *The Three Beavers Brown* (Stenson & Zammit, 1999), which helped the students easily transfer hero, villain and want from one story to the other. Once the students could see that both stories had heroes, villains and wants, they spontaneously looked for other kinds of resemblances. They noticed that, “the three billy goats have to pass the bridge and the beavers have to pass the creek”, “the troll and the bigfoot both want the billy goats and the beavers”, the sound/word patterns of “trip, trap” and “slip, slap” made by the heroes, and the size patterns of “little billy goat and little beaver … and medium … and big.”

When Ms. Lydia asked, “What if we changed the hero of this story?”, she was hoping this would elicit a dialogue about planning their own billy goat versions. However, some students understood this question to mean something else, and they responded by transferring the structures to other stories, television shows or movies that they had seen, for example:

- Gaby: I would choose three bears … and a human (*Goldilocks and the Three Bears*)
- Nadia: Red riding hood … and the big bad wolf.
- Student: Batman and the Joker.

The students transferred the conceptual framework to make sense of what they were reading (or writing). When a student did not move the narrative ideas to a new text, their responses tended to remain more superficial. This was observed in Safia’s comparison of *The Boy and the Giants* (Moodie, 1993) and *Anna and the Seven Swans* (Silverman, 1984). Ms. Lydia asked Safia to talk about her drawings (see Figure 36):
Safia: The fish is helping Thomas.
Teacher: How does the fish help Thomas?
Safia: Get Thomas to the surface [of the water].
Teacher: Now on the other side, what will you draw?
Safia: I’m going to draw the swans. I’m going to draw Ivan on one of the swan’s backs.

Figure 36. Safia’s illustration of a story event. She showed Thomas carried underwater, on the back of a fish, from The Boy and the Giants (Moodie, 1993).

Safia drew an association between two images of humans riding on the backs of animals. In one, Thomas was carried on the back of a salmon and in the other, Ivan rode on the back of a swan. However, there was nothing structurally or functionally similar about these two events. In her first picture, Safia drew Thomas (hero) carried on the back of the salmon (helper) presumably headed toward Kate (want). In her next picture, Safia was about to draw Ivan (want) carried away from Anna (hero) on the back of the swan (villain). It is important to note that Safia’s response to the activity was not incorrect. She was asked to draw an event that reminded her of the first event. However, the pairing that Safia had made did not show how she understood the text. Indeed, when Ms. Lydia asked for explanations of her thinking, Safia was unable to articulate the relationships between the characters in the images she drew. Noting that Safia was not using the structures to understand the textual relations, Ms. Lydia saw this as an opportunity for a ‘mini-lesson’. Together they discussed the functional relationships in Safia’s image of Thomas riding on the back of the fish (helper helping hero).
She then asked Safia to find a similar relationship (instead of a similar picture) in the second story. Safia searched the book, *Anna and the Seven Swans* (Silverman, 1984), until she found an image and text with similar functional relationships. Safia chose Anna (the hero, like Thomas) and Ivan being helped by the apple tree (a helper, like the fish). Following this discussion with her teacher, Safia could then articulate the relationships of hero, helper and want in both her drawings. Simply identifying a visual similarity between two images did not serve Safia’s understanding of the new reading experience. Whereas the narrative functions and their relationships formed a framework that she could transfer to help make sense of another text. Safia then chose to draw a different second picture to show the relational understanding she and the teacher had worked through (see Figure 37). The images that Safia drew were not the same visually but their structural relationships were the same.

![Figure 37](image_url)

*Figure 37.* Safia drew Thomas on the back of the fish (left) and Anna and Ivan hiding in the apple tree (right). Although these two pictures look different, both show heroes (Thomas and Anna) being helped by helpers (fish and the apple tree) so they can rescue their loved ones.

The students showed variations in how they understood each of the literary concepts yet they could still make use of these structures to frame new reading experiences. Before reading *The Lion and the Mouse*, they used their knowledge of story structure to frame their predictions. Their understanding of the Overcoming the Monster plot and the relations of hero, want and villain, led most students to predict: the mouse would be the hero; the mouse might want cheese, friendship or freedom from the lion; and the lion would be the villain.
because he is bigger and eats mice. In addition, Anh wondered aloud, “Who’s the helper?” She was curious about what form this structure might take, expecting that all the narrative functions would occur in new stories. She later exclaimed, “the mouse is the helper … because the mouse said if you need me, come and tell me!” She was obviously looking for the helper as the teacher read the story. Bao used the same structural framework as Anh, but he speculated that “the lion is the helper … because the lion let the mouse go and then when the little lion needs help, the mouse helps him back.” They both transferred the same structures, using them to understand the story relationships.

After the winter holidays, the students transferred the narrative structures to Dragon Slayer (Kuczera, 2004), even though this story was told through a different medium and almost entirely without words. Almost unanimously, the students predicted that the story would be an Overcoming the Monster plot. However, as they discovered through discussion, this story could be categorized as Redemption. A month later some students transferred Redemption to frame their predictions of The Crane Girl (Charles, 1999), as shown in this example:

Student: It’s a Redemption story.
Teacher: If it’s a Redemption story, what might you expect to happen?
Kadeen: The crane and the girl will be mad at each other at the beginning and they will become friends.

Kadeen did not only transfer the ‘mad-then-friends’ idea from The Lion and the Mouse. He understood it to be one form of the Redemption structure. In this example, Joseph transfers the form of OCTM to make a prediction:

Joseph: Because she’s happy she’s with the mom and dad … but I think something’s wrong …
Teacher: Something’s wrong? What’s going to be wrong?
Joseph: The swan … with the baby …
Teacher: Something’s going to be wrong?
Student: The crane’s going to take away the baby.
This was the form OCTM took in *Anna and the Seven Swans* (Silverman, 1984). Although neither Kadeen nor Joseph’s predictions ‘came true’, it was not the rightness or wrongness of their predictions that Ms. Lydia focused on. Rather she was concerned with the relations they were drawing and how they were thinking. Because the students were thinking relationally, as they encountered new elements that did not ‘fit’ their predictions, they simply re-thought how the elements related during and after reading.

The students made use of the class discourse to figure out how the cranes functioned in *The Crane Girl* (Charles, 1999), as shown in this exchange:

Teacher: Is there a villain in this story?
Student: No.
Student: Yes, yes.
Teacher: Who is the villain?
Student: The crane.

Cranes look like swans, who were the villains in *Anna and the Seven Swans* (Silverman, 1984). Perhaps this student had transferred the idea that if tall white birds were villains in one story, they might be villains in another story. The relational discourse continued as other students considered whether this was the form that villain took in the story:

Student: Because the [Yoshiko] turned into a crane.
Student: But that’s what she wanted [the hero had asked to become a crane].
Neela: I know the cranes are not the villains because they granted her what she wanted.

Neela transferred the structural relations of helper-hero-want to make sense of cranes turning a girl into a crane. If the girl wanted to be a crane, then the cranes must be helpers because they gave her what she wanted. The discourse continued:

Joseph: But that’s not really her wish.
Teacher: What’s really her wish?
Joseph: To be with her family again ... that’s why that is not her wish.
Student: She wants to be a baby again ... but she don’t want to be a baby.
Teacher: Is there a villain?
At first this discourse may seem confusing, as the students appeared to be contradicting each other. But they were using structural concepts and transferring ideas from one story to another to make sense of the *The Crane Girl* (Charles, 1999) relations. In the story, Yoshiko thought that her family did not love her so she went in search of a new family, which she found with the cranes. So in the above discourse, the students were figuring out the different layers to what the hero, Yoshiko, wanted. In the story, Yoshiko explicitly stated that she wanted to be a baby with a new family. However, the students were aware that there was more to what she wanted. At a deeper level, Yoshiko wanted to feel loved by her own family. In their discussions, the students used the concepts of hero, want and villain to make sense of the depth of relationships in the story. Turning Yoshiko into a crane seemed ‘villainous’ when taken out of context. But within the story context, it temporarily satisfied her desire. Transferring the structures to this new story, enabled the students to delve into the complexities embedded in this seemingly simple story.

The interactive board was an ideal tool to facilitate thinking with structural concepts. The students easily moved images of different stories from one plot category to the next, sometimes back and forth, as they discussed the various functional relationships within the stories. Watching the students ‘move’ stories from category to category, we could see that they understood (albeit unconsciously) the fluid and flexible nature of concepts. A few students even requested to hear new stories for different plot structures. During our fourth meeting, Ms. Lydia told the group, “Neela is dying to read some Rags to Riches, but she wants some ‘Riches to Rags’ stories too.”

At three different times during the school year, Lydia relayed to me instances I missed, where the students had transferred the structural concepts. In the first term, during the first few weeks of guided reading, she called a group to the conference table to read a leveled book. The four students sat down, looked at the cover of the book, and began to discuss who the hero, villains and helpers might be, what the hero might want, and if it was an OCTM story. What struck the teacher most was that she had not thought to transfer this framework to guide the reading groups. Rather she had prepared instructional notes only
about print concepts, syntax and phonology. She laughed at how this conceptual framework was already part of the students’ thinking.

Ms. Lydia relayed a second notable situation to me near the end of the second term. When reading independently, the students would often bring their books to her and talk about them. She began writing their comments on sticky notes and sticking them to the cover of the books. When I arrived to visit, several students showed me their books and these notes. They were articulating structural relationships on their own to each other, the teacher and myself. The narrative structures had formed a schema for their independent reading, as shown in the following three examples from students at different academic levels:

- Safia read *A Creepy Case of Vampires* (Oppel, 2002), a chapter book. She noted the primary quest plot, a warning from the helper, and the dad was the hero and the kids were the want. She noted that the story had the I→E and OCTM plots, and she gave a description of the moves.
- Nadia read *Tikkatoo’s Journey* (Loverseed, 1990), a tale told through words and pictures. She discussed the quest, redemption, and Rags to Riches plots, and described the helper.
- Than read *Sector 7* (Wiesner, 1999), a story told through pictures. He described the quest plot, and discussed the helper function.

During the third term, Ms. Lydia invited Officer Dave to speak to the students about his job and police training. However, he also shared a little about his journey to become a police officer. He told them that his teenage years were troubled and he was often in conflict with his friends and family, and even the law. Then he turned his life around and became a police officer, which gave him great satisfaction. The following day, as Ms. Lydia was reviewing the visit, Nadia remarked that Officer Dave’s story was Rebirth because he was troubled as a teenager and was ‘reborn’ to become a police officer. Not only was Ms. Lydia surprised that Nadia (and others) remembered and understood the plot of Rebirth, but that it was used to frame this ‘real-life’ event. Officer Dave’s name came up again in a discussion about the movie *Hercules* (Clements & Musker, 1997):

Teacher: Does [Hercules] remind you of another character?
Student: Officer Dave.
Teacher: How come Officer Dave? He [Hercules] doesn’t look anything like Officer Dave?
Student: Because he tried again, and again.
Student: No. Because he was bad and ran away from home … then he reborn.
Student: Rebirth.

This *Hercules* (Clements & Musker, 1997) discussion was observed during my last classroom visit in June. The students talked about it through the framework (lens) of each plot structure. To show how the students transferred all the plot categories, I have condensed their long discussion. I kept their responses in chronological order but removed comments about other narrative structures, story retelling, and the teacher’s summaries and rephrasing:

Teacher: I was just wondering … what kind of story is this?
Student: … overcoming the monster.
Alex: Overcoming the monster
Teacher: Why?
Alex: Because he [Hercules] overcomes the villain.
Student: I was going to say that.
Teacher: Who’s the villain?
Student: Hades.
Student: Yeah, Hades.
Bao: He overcomes others.
Teacher: There were others?
Student: Titans.

A moment later,

Gaby: Quest.
Teacher: Why is it a quest?
Gaby: He is trying to find his real … home.

Later in the discourse,

Teacher: What kind of story is it?
Bao: Redemption.
Teacher: How?
Bao: He needs to become a real hero.

Further along,
Devon: Rebirth.
Teacher: How might that be rebirth?
Nadia: Because he tried again, and again, and again, and again …
Student: He tried again, and again.
Nadia: He really took out what was in him.
Teacher: I like how you said that.
Bao: There is another reason.
Teacher: What is it?
Bao: He had his parents … then someone stole him … then he got new parents.
Teacher: Almost like he was born again with these real true parents.
Bao: He is born two times … three times. The gods born the baby, then the mother and the …
Student: … father
Student: … then he come down [to earth]

A little while later,
Teacher: Any other … what other … do you see elements in there? We have redemption, it’s a quest, rebirth … it “took out what was really in him” ...
Student: Rags to riches.
Student: Rags to riches.
Student: It’s riches to rags and then rags to riches.
Teacher: How is it riches to rags … I don’t remember anything about money?
Student: At first he’s with the gods so he was rich.
Teacher: Was he poor at the end of the story?
Student: No, he was rich.
Teacher: Rich with what?
Student: He was so brave he got lots of trophies ... and
Gaby: Too much trophies.
Student: And he was very famous, so he was still rich.

A few minutes later,
Teacher: Is there an element of innocence to experience?

*(she reviews the categories that have been mentioned already)*
Student: Yes.
Joseph: There is, there is! It’s like shelter … because he was born a god but then he …
Student: … outside
Student: … in the human
Bao: He doesn’t know how to be a hero yet.

Later,
Teacher: Why is it innocence to experience?
Student: He didn’t know how to be a god. He was a baby and then he … someone kidnapped him … and he didn’t know about gods.
Student: There were three helpers for the bad guys.
Student: You see the chain … the chain … then he put it in *(unclear)*. Then he realized that the necklace came from the gods so he thinks … he was a god.

Interspersed between the different plot topics in the above conversation, were small discussions about other narrative concepts. As one student offered a reason for categorizing the story with one plot structure, or described a passage, other students would make further connections to structures or to other stories.

**4.8 Transferring Concepts in Grade 2**

Ms. Aimee also encouraged her students to look for resemblances across texts. As she introduced each narrative concept, the students transferred it to the new narratives they
encountered and even back to past stories. As Ms. Aimee recalled, the students “remembered more over a longer period of time. They didn’t forget about stories they read early in the year.” The students even remembered small details. For example, with *The Boy and the Giants* (Moodie, 1993), when the class was discussing how the sea princess changed her appearance, actions and surroundings to seem helpful, Maysun quickly transferred this new and more complex helper-villain relationship back to another story they had read, as shown in this part of the class dialogue:

Teacher: (quoting from *The Boy and the Giants* (Moodie, 1993)) “Everything is not as it seems.” Where have you seen that before?

Maysun: In Hansel and Gretel. The stepmother smiled.

The stepmother smiled so the children would not know that she was planning to abandon them. Maysun was drawing similar conclusions about the two characters by their villain-helper functions. In both stories the villainous characters attempted to deceive the heroes into thinking that they were helpers.

By April, the grade 2 students had some understanding of all six plot categories. The students considered several of these when predicting relationships before they read a text and again after reading. They did not always agree about which one was dominant, however, they all used the structural framework to discuss the stories and to relate the elements within the story and across stories. For example, after viewing *Qalupalik* (Papatsie, 2010), Oma categorized the story as I→E because “the son, he was innocent because he did not listen and after he was experienced because he started listening to his mom ... because he knows what happens if he goes near the shore.” Maysun used another plot structure to think about the story, saying “I think it’s a quest ... because when he [dad] heard the first time that his son was taken by Qalupalik, he went on the journey even if it took a day, he still went to find his son.” The students could express that in an OCTM plot, the monster “dies or it is never to be seen again,” but they were not completely sure about classifying the story this way. They thought that because the character, Qalupalik, remained at the end, she was not overcome, and therefore story could not be OCTM. One student was able to think about the OCTM plot only in relation to one character, the boy, who did overcome Qalupalik because he learned to
listen. The monster/villain remained in the story in connection to future children who do not listen. Another student transferred the helper function momentarily to consider whether Qalupalik, might be a helper because “maybe she’s whispering into his [the boy’s] ear, ‘you should listen to your elders. Maybe you can go and play after you’ve done your chores.’” In the story, there was no indication that Qalupalik’s intent was to be helpful. However, this student made use of her understanding of helpers and villains to figure out Qalupalik’s role. It was through the boy’s encounter with the monster that he came to understand the wisdom of his elders. Although Qalupalik functioned as a villain, positive changes came about through her relations in the story. The intricacies between ‘intent’ and ‘change’ had been touched upon by the grade 2 students, and was perhaps something that would be considered in more depth by older students.

The students transferred new narrative structures and understandings not only to new stories, but also transferred them back to stories read in previous months. The last two plot structures introduced to students were Innocence to Experience and Quest. Some students thought back to stories they had previously categorized as OCTM, Redemption, and RtoR, and re-viewed them through the lenses of the two new plot structures. For example, the students articulated clear evidence to support their categorization of *Lost and Found* (Jeffers, 2005), and how it related to other stories. Nine of ten focus students (one sample was incomplete) drew cross-textual relations based on the similarity of the plot structure. For example, Nina wrote about how she thought the I→E plot shaped the story: “The story is an Innocence to Experience because the boy didn’t know where did a penguin live and he found out that in a book that penguin lived in the south pole!” She then used I→E to think back to *The Crane Girl* (Charles, 1999), in a new way: “This story is related to craw girl because the girl didn’t know her parents didn’t like her and Finally her parents missed her when she was gone. Now the girl understands her parents like her.” The word “understands” indicated how Nina was understanding the I→E plot. Nina used the plot structure to see another layer to *The Crane Girl* (Charles, 1999) and to see similar relationships across both stories, even though she chose an internal/psychological hero-
change in one story and compared it to the learning of a new fact by the hero in the other story.

Another interesting example of a plot structure being transferred back to a previously-read story, occurred during my last classroom visit. The students were reviewing plot categories and discussed how they could be defined. They moved between discussing the structures and the forms they took. One student mentioned *Cinderella* as an example of Rags to Riches, leading two other students to attempt a plot definition:

- **Helen:** Because in Cinderella, first she was like rags and then when she married the prince she was rich.
- **Maysun:** When the hero is poor then they get money, then they be rich.
- **Halima:** The hero has to go on a journey to go find his or her lack.
- **Brandon:** Like in *The Billy Goats Gruff*, the hero will satisfy … if they overcome the monster they’re going to be into riches ... the green green grass.

Brandon was not confusing money and grass. He was revealing a previously hidden (or unexamined) aspects of the billy goats story by re-viewing with the Rags to Riches framework.

### 4.9 Dialogue in Grade 1

Most class discussions began with a teacher-led question that was usually open-ended, such as “why do you think about …”, “how might …”, or “any ideas about …”. The students attended to the discussion topics and listened to and responded to their peers’ ideas. This gave the discussions a feeling of collaboration and a sense of group understanding. For example, in one conversation about *The Three Billy Goats Gruff*, Anh identified some functions, Nadia articulated the relationships between them, and Neela added a description:

- **Anh:** They want … the three billy goats have no leaves, so they go on the bridge but the troll won’t let them.
- **Nadia:** They were looking for grass and they feel that they want to go across the bridge but the troll wouldn’t let them.
- **Neela:** But the troll won’t let them. The troll is so mean, he won’t let them go to the grass.
Their comments were connected by a focus on the topic, seen in their repetition of Anh’s way of phrasing the troll’s actions: he “won’t let them” or “wouldn’t let them” get to the grass. Ms. Lydia asked questions following most student responses, to help the students connect to the ideas and topics. Her questions were to elicit further descriptions, elaborations, connections or other related ideas. However, students sometimes responded to each other without these prompts and this increased in frequency over the school year.

**4.9.1 Class discussions helped thinking during independent activities.** Following most class lessons and discussions, the students were given a practice activity. During one lesson, I noticed that many students had participated in the whole class modeled writing discussion. They developed a story outline. Afterward all the students applied the concepts from the discussion to independently develop their own versions of a story. With the exception of a couple of students, they did not copy each other nor did they replicate the class example. Instead, they followed the process of relating narrative functions, developed during the class discussion, to create an individual story plan and vary the forms in their own ways.

The students continued to take group-generated ideas and make use of them in their own ways, throughout the year. For example, during one *Dragon Slayer* (Kuczera, 2004) discussion, they explored the differing points of view of the knight and the horse, by inferring the possible thoughts of these two characters. The students began by thinking about the hero-helper relationship, as seen in these students’ comments:

Bao: He [dragon slayer] saw the baby dragon but he didn’t want it because it was just a dragon.

Anh: The horse wants the … he wants the dragon slayer to … the horse wants the dragons slayer to keep the baby dragons.

Ms. Lydia chose a few shared ideas from the students to serve as an example of the horse’s thoughts. On the interactive board she wrote over the image of the horse, from one event: “Do not leave the baby dragon! Take the baby! I will go when you get the baby dragon!” (see Figure 38)
Figure 38. The inferred thoughts of the dragon slayer (hero) and horse (helper). Ms. Lydia wrote some of the students’ ideas about this scene from Dragon Slayer (Kuczera, 2004).

When the students individually wrote about the dragon slayer’s thoughts, they each figured out the relationship in their own written words:

Anh        Go get him now dragon slayer. Just be a blacksmith because I’m tired and I not going?
Ariana     You have to get the baby dragon first I am naver leving (never leaving)
Safia       No donot leve (leave) this little baby dragon alon you nvre (never) think about baby dragons that’s wuy (why) you want to leve.
Devon       I’m Not going untel you get the baby Dragen DO NOT PUSh …
            ME !!!!!!! Come on get hiem ples! then he can’t eat bring him.
Than        You wet (want) to be a Dad! tac (take) the BaBy!
Kyran       The horse thiks that the dragon slayer need to get the baby dragon and don’t leave the baby dragon alone.
Nadia       Why are you pooshing (pushing) me lets take the baby with us.
Neela       Take him with you! go get Him! Dragon Slayer! Just go take Him with you!
Joseph      I bon’t what (don’t want) to lyev (leave) the BaBy Dragon. get the BaBy Dragon.
The whole-class discussions helped these students draw relations, which they continued to think about on their own. With the above scene, students were able to understand the helper relationships from the point of view of the helper, then express it in their own ways. In this case, the horse refused to do what the dragon slayer told it to do because it knew what the slayer did not yet know about himself.

4.9.2 Developing ideas through agreement and opposition. Students sometimes opposed each other as they worked through ideas, sometimes changing their minds and sometimes sticking with ideas as further supporting evidence was connected. For example, Luxman thought that the sea princesses in *The Boy and the Giants* (Moodie, 1993) might function as a helper. Despite opposition from peers who thought that the princesses were really “villains” and “monsters”, he provided relational evidence to support his idea, specifically that the princess “presents the pearls” to Thomas. However, several students disagreed, articulating that this character could not be a helper because she was a sea monster in disguise. Although the students did not arrive at a consensus, over the course of this day’s discussion, they all attempted to support their ideas with relational evidence from the story, facilitating a deeper look into how the characters functioned throughout the story. Over the ten months of observations, I never saw the students ‘argue’ about their differing ideas.

The students often relied on each other to help figure out ideas. When Than was standing at the board considering how he might categorize events as either a world we want or a world we don’t want, he turned to the class for ideas before making his final decision. This was typical of the collaborative nature of the dialogue. Even when working through opposing ideas, the students tended to build on each other’s ideas to consider new aspects of a story, look at a story from a new perspective, and even to figure out what the concepts mean.

4.9.3 Thinking together through dialogue. The whole-class discussions seemed to function as one thinking process. Ms. Lydia began a discussion about the meaning of the home and HOME functions, and students responded:
Teacher: What does this mean, the house with no lights? [home function]
Neela: Fake home.
Teacher: Tell me more.
Devon: Something is wrong.
Gaby: World we don’t want.
Than: There’s a villain … a bad guy.
Teacher: *(repeats question)*
Joseph: The lights are off.
Vithiya: Monsters in the stories.
Joseph: No one is home.
Neela: There is some monsters there.
Teacher: In the house?
Neela: No. Around it.

Later in the discussion,
Teacher: At last … *(she holds up the HOME function card)*
Ariana: The real home.
Bao: There is someone home.
Joseph: The lights are on.
Devon: World we want.
Neela: Villain is knocked out.
Gaby: Gets knocked out.
Teacher: The lurking threat is gone. And the hero?
Student: Gets what he wants.
Student: Gets what they want.

In part of another discussion, when relating *Heckedy Peg* (Wood, 2001) and *The Wolf and the Seven Little Kids*, the students generated 12 separate ideas. Five were response to open-ended prompts from the teacher, and seven were direct responses to a peer. Except for one student, the class did not repeat ideas, which indicated that they were engaged in the discussion and listened to peer contributions.
Frequently, Ms. Lydia reviewed lessons and discussions before the class embarked on a new aspect of their story analysis. At these times, the students repeated many of the ideas that were given during a previous lesson. However, the ideas were most often not repeated by students who originally stated them. Rather, it was another student who reminded the class of a peer’s idea. Perhaps students were simply copying a peer’s statement. However, because the focus of the discussions was on relational thinking and not simply right or wrong responses, it appeared that the students did not think of their peers’ ideas as separate from their own thinking processes. For example, when one student first contributed the idea that the A-bomb functioned as the villain/monster in Sadako (Coerr, 2002), eight students immediately burst out their support or elaborated on this idea. These outbursts overlapped each other and were spoken confidently as clear statements. One student began the thinking process and the others made it part of their own thinking. This particular dialogue led the way to a change in the whole class’ understanding of villains and monsters, which was seen in later discussions.

In January, one class discussion I observed was built of 129 responses from many of the students in the class. From my notes and audio recordings, I was able to identify the voices of 12 (of 20) students contributing to the discussion. The remaining unidentified voices, however, still contributed to 23% of the discussion contributions. This was typical of the grade 1 whole-class conversations. Across the many conversations, different students dominated in the number of contributions, while others shared one or two thoughts or elaborated on their peers’ comments. Ideas or topics were frequently developed and moved along by several students, rarely just one or two students. This small part of the Dragon Slayer (Kuczera, 2004) discussion serves as an example:

Joseph: If the dragon [mother dragon] burned the trees … and then if they [baby dragons] burned all the trees … they [villagers] can’t live.

Student: They [villagers] need air from the trees.

Devon: At the end of the story, right, the dragon was burned all the houses. Maybe people might die. (*he speculated on a different possible ending*)
Teacher: *(unsure what the students’ mean)* At the end ... are dragons burning houses? Or at the beginning of the story?

Devon: Beginning.

Teacher: *(now understanding)* Oh yes. People would lose their shelter, clothes, everything they need and die.

Student: There’s no place to live.

Vithiya: If the dragon … is burn the trees … the world we don’t want.

This idea about the dragon’s destruction originated from Joseph, yet the other students and Ms. Lydia elaborated and added details, including the structural concept “world we don’t want” from Vithiya, one of the lowest academic students in this class.

In another discussion, Than contributed a new idea about the dragon slayer’s point of view, saying, “He’s thinking, ‘I want to be a blacksmith too’ because he’s so tired of killing dragons.” As the dialogue progressed, another student suddenly shared an idea that the dragon slayer wanted to be “a blacksmith” to which Than replied, “That’s what I said!” It is possible that this second student was simply repeating what Than had said. This kind of repetition happened frequently. However, these repetitions were usually uttered at different points in the conversations and were almost always connected to the flow of conversation and the topic. It was possible that the students were not just repeating a good idea but rather re-stating relationships from the text as they came to their own understandings of them. For example, later in the above lesson, Than exclaimed, “Oooooh! He got what he wants!” This relationship between the dragon slayer and his new life had been previously discussed. Yet Than’s outburst seemed to indicate that he suddenly understood the relationship. In turn, when Than introduced the ‘good and bad side of the slayer’s heart’ idea, eight other students immediately expressed this thought in their own words. In the following days, many students referred to the ‘half-heart’ (or half-hero half-villain) idea during discussions. In fact, it was another student who named the dual hero-villain notion the “half-card”, and another student who physically overlapped the two function cards to show that the hero and villain structures shaped a single character. The students did not seem to be simply repeating what they heard...
in previous discussions. Their articulations seemed to indicate that they were thinking about what they heard.

The class discussions seemed beneficial even to the students who did not help move the class deeper into ideas. Vithiya was quiet and one of the lower academic students in the class. Many of her contributions to the class discussions appeared to be a repetition of what others had said, as in the following example:

Anh: When she [Yoshiko] turns to a girl back, she will be normal … and the jealousy will be gone.

Vithiya: In the end the jealousy goes away!

Vithiya often burst out with these repetitions, or waved her hand enthusiastically to catch Ms. Lydia’s attention so she could share her thoughts. It seemed that even though she was repeating information that others had said, she seemed to feel that she was sharing an idea and contributing to the discussion. Perhaps the contributions from the other students served to help develop her understanding. Interestingly, I never heard her contribute information that was tangential to the text or off the topic of discussion. She drew relations with the narrative structures, but did so after the ideas first emerged from others in the discussions.

4.9.4 Developing questions during discussions. Near the end of the school year, the grade 1 students suddenly began suggesting new story possibilities and asking ‘what-if” questions. This may have occurred a few times earlier in the year, yet it was during a lesson in May that Ms. Lydia and I both noted this change. For example, the stories that the class typically read were comedic in their plot structure. Now Nadia wondered, “If the hero wants something, what if the villain kills it?” Here she was questioning a possible tragic relationship, in which the villain permanently destroys what the hero wants. Devon questioned what would happen if the events of a story kept moving down, without the typical comedic turn upward: “What if we continue world we don’t want?” Kyran questioned whether two plot structures could occur within the same story: “If it’s a Quest story [how] it is supposed to be an Overcoming the Monster story?” In response to Kyran, Neela further wondered, “What if a story has all of the categories inside it?” A month later, the students
answered this question themselves, by seeing how all the plot categories were “inside” the *Hercules* (Clements & Musker, 1997) movie.

Ms. Lydia and I noted that the students’ questions were not intended to elicit simple yes/no or correct/incorrect responses. Rather the students were questioning new relationships and new applications of the narrative structures. Their questioning continued through the discussions of *Qalupalik* (Papatsie, 2010), with the students asking:

- What if Qalupalik told the walrus and the polar bear to tempt him [father/hero]?
- What if they [walrus and polar bear] didn’t listen?
- What if he [father/hero] was tempted off the course, and went to hunt walrus?
- What if the dad went to the polar bear?
- What if they [disobedient boy and his friend] changed their minds and turned around? [did not disobey]
- What if Qalupalik disguised herself as the father?

All of these questions were related to the structures of the stories.

It was also new that the students began answering their peers’ questions. For example after a student asked, “What if the dad went to the polar bear?”, his peers responded:

- Student: Is there a card for riches to rags?
- Student: Then there will be no more riches.
- Student: It’s going down.
- Student: World we want to world we don’t want.

Here students suggested that if the father followed the polar bear instead of searching for his lost son, then the story plot would become a tragic version of Rags to Riches. The events would move metaphorically down as the father loses his riches (his son) and remained in a “world we don’t want” of unsatisfied desire.

In another example, the students responded to their peer’s question, “What if they changed their minds and turned around?” (in other words, what if the boy and his friend, as they were running toward the shore in disobedience, changed their minds and ran back to camp, thus obeying the elders):

- Student: Nothing.
Student: The story would be so quick.
Student: No naughty children. [no lack, so no story]
Student: No adventure.
Student: The end of the story.
Student: No heroes. [because there is no lack to search for]

With these responses, the students understood that the story would not continue since there would no longer be a lack that needed to be satisfied.

4.10 Dialogue in Grade 2

Whole class dialogue played a prominent role in the grade 2 class. Most of the lessons and activities that I observed involved whole class discussions, either beginning or concluding the students’ activities or both. At these times, the students were engaged with language concepts and stories, and they responded to each other’s comments to build up the class understanding as a whole. Ms. Aimee also organized small group work into the class routine and so literary discussions were observed at these times as well.

4.10.1 Whole class dialogue influenced small group discussions. To begin a discussion, Aimee asked students to complete this statement: “Because Thomas helped animals that were sick or injured …” This open-ended prompt allowed for a myriad of possible relations to be drawn. The relations drawn and constructed during in whole class discussions typically served as the foundation for small group activities. For example, following the above question for the whole class, in small groups students were asked to consider, “What if Thomas had not looked after animals who were sick or injured?” In their groups, the students shared ideas about these possible relationship changes. Each student’s final written response brought together the whole class dialogues, the small group sharing and his or her own ideas. To show one line of thinking, I’ve abridged a long whole-class discussion and omitted the teacher’s prompts. The class discussed how Thomas helped animals that were sick or injured and the consequences of those actions:

Maysun: When Thomas helped the animals, the seagull or the otter or the fish … the seagull came back to help. (hero-helper relationship)
Anna: The eagle helped Thomas go up the hill. (how the helper helped)
Helen: Thomas helped the eagle fix his broken wing so now he helped Thomas get to the castle. *(hero-helper relationship)*

Brandon: That … the great salmon … because it was too little … Thomas said, “little fish grow big and strong” and then he [salmon] get him [Thomas] when he was to marry one of the sea monsters *(how the helper helped)*

Mahirah: Because he [salmon] felt grateful *(why the helper helped)*

Mahirah: The salmon helped Thomas to come back to the castle because the sea kingdom … it was sea monsters … so the salmon helped Thomas come back up. *(how the helpers helped)*

Mahirah: Salmon … they can swim. *(how the helper was able to help)*

Shortly after, in their small groups, the students discussed the changes if Thomas had not looked after animals who were sick or injured. In their group, Halima and Mahirah discussed:

Mahirah: The animals won’t help Thomas, and Thomas can’t save Kate. *(hero cannot satisfy the lack)*

Halima: Thomas will not be able to get the pearls … because he can’t swim that deep … only an otter. *(hero cannot satisfy the lack)*

Halima: Because he [Thomas] can’t help Kate so if he can’t help Kate he won’t be the hero *(hero categorization depends on satisfying the lack)*

Mahirah: If he can’t help animals and Kate. *(hero cannot satisfy the lack)*

Halima: But if Thomas can’t help the animals he wouldn’t be the hero.

In the above dialogue, Halima and Mahirah primarily focused on the possible failure of the hero in getting what is wanted because there were no animals to help. The whole-class discussion served as a foundation for this paired thinking. The class reviewed the hero-helper-villain-want relationships together and later Halima and Mahirah could relate the change in the hero to the ending and the whole of the plot. On their group chart paper, Halima and Mahirah (independently) wrote the following statements:

- if Thomas did not help animals the animals won’t help Thomas
- Thomas will not be able to get the pearls
• Thomas cant save Kate
• Thoms wold not be a hero because he cant help Kate.
• Kate will get eaten by the giant
• only the giant will be left
• thomas will be eaten

These written statements extend beyond the paired discussion to consider the other functions in the story, specifically that of the villain. Mahirah’s written statements, when compared to the audio recordings, showed evidence of her discussions with Halima. She listened, talked, then rephrased shared ideas in her written statements. She admitted some of her ideas initially came from Halima, but independently she could still explain all the relationships she put in writing. By discussing ideas with their group members, students were able to explore how many aspects of the story were interrelated. This ‘whole class, small group or pair then individual response’ pattern was typical in this classroom.

4.10.2 Students constructed ideas together. The students developed their ideas together through their discussions in much the same way that the teachers did during our meetings. The discussions that the teachers had together had an impact on the discussions they later developed in their classrooms with their students. Ms. Aimee acknowledged, “honestly, there were things in the stories that I would not have come to on my own. The dialogue brought in different perspectives.”

Ms. Aimee asked questions and further prompted students to stimulate responses that elaborated, related and expanded on any single comment. She also asked for elaboration on both the structural terms used and the particular forms of these structures within each story. Ms. Aimee asked students to clarify their ideas or statements, if they were unclear, and then encouraged any student to further expand on an idea. This contributed to the overall sense of the class functioning as a whole. For example, the class began discussing the use of food in Hansel and Gretel. They first described how food was used in this story, then moved toward a more general description of the contrasting ways that food is typically used in many stories. Students commented that, “in the world we want, we use food to save lives and to grow” and
contrasted this with how food was used to “hurt the children” or “for tricking people” in a world we don’t want. They continued:

Teacher: We can use food in two ways?
Student 1: For selfish reasons and polite reasons.
Teacher: What do you mean ‘polite’?
Student 1: Food to make kids grow ... and healthy.

Then two other students expanded:

Student 2: Food for good and evil.
Student 3: You can use food tricking people and eating.

Many of the class ideas were built together, with students responding thoughtfully to their peers. The grade 2 students tended to extend a peer’s idea rather than repeat it, as seen in Joseph’s comment:

Mahirah: She [Nyasha] likes working. She’s thinking to herself ‘I’ll do the important things, that’s working, and then I’ll do the fancy things.’
Joseph: This one [Manyara] is getting ready to be a queen and this one [Nyasha] is kind of getting ready to be a worker.

Through their discussions, students developed ideas together beyond the depth they all would have achieved alone. The discussions also revealed a depth to the students’ thinking that they were not always able to articulate on their own in writing.

4.10.3 Narrative function cards facilitated discussions. At the end of the first term, as part of a language rotation centre, Ms. Aimee asked the students to categorize characters that they knew from various multimedia narratives. After reading several responses, she found they lacked depth, in that their responses were vague with little relational thinking.

When I arrived one day to observe, she said:

Some were having difficulty ... I immediately pulled out these four cards [hero, villain, helper and lack]. ‘This is our hero card. If Soren is the hero you have to relate your thinking to the lack. How do we know they are the hero in relation to the lack? How do we know they are a helper in relation to the lack?’ [Their] answers just
improved 100%. They weren’t just relying on ‘nice’, ‘he helped’, ‘he’s bad’. They were actually pulling the details from the story, related to what he was doing.

Once Ms. Aimee gave the students the physical narrative function cards to help them focus on the relationships in the story, it was not only their written responses that changed but their discussions developed. The students began prompting each other for explanations about their decisions. They discussed details from the story that supported their narrative ideas, often helping each other figure out how characters functioned, as in the following example:

Helen: Okay. Let me check Chrysanthemum.

Oma: Her lack was that she didn’t want anyone to make fun of her name. She needed help from …

Helen: Actually, you should put Chrysanthemum as a helper.

Later on in their discussion about another character:

Helen: Oh … he helped Kludd … he …

Oma: (clarifying the function to Helen) He helped the hero, Soren. The people who help the heroes, they’re helpers.

With the use of the function cards, the grade 2 students added to each others’ responses, helping clarify the ideas, as illustrated by Mahirah and Oma:

Mahirah: I am going to choose … the Troll. The Troll is a villain because he … he wanted the Billy Goats Gruff … he wanted to eat the Billy Goats Gruff.

Oma: So you’re basically saying that he’s stopping the other characters’ lack.

Another student asked Mahirah about another character:

Student: Where does Thomas go?

Mahirah: Thomas goes into the hero [category] because he saves Kate.

Student: Thomas was saving his lack.

The students moved back and forth relating form to structure, helping clarify each other’s understanding.

Students also worked together to fully articulate an idea, as shown in the following discussion about the OCTM plot:
Henry: The villain will never be seen again.
Oma: Because the hero defeats the monster so the monster cannot be villainous any more.
Joseph: When the monster is gone, that means the hero has ... so the hero can get his lack.

All students participated to varying degrees in whole class and small group literary discussions. Because the dialogue was built around inquiries into conceptual relationships, all students were able to respond at their own levels of understanding. Students who were not yet ready to draw extensive relationships were able to contribute to the discussions with descriptions and observations, which served as the foundation for further and deeper relationships to be drawn. For example, during the *Dragon Slayer* (Kuczera, 2004) analysis, students were asked to consider, “What if the horse had not helped the dragon slayer?” With this question, several students were able to consider all the possible changing relationships if this helper function was removed. Even Kumani was able to explore the actions of the horse and share her ideas with others in her group: “Because the horse did not help the dragon slayer ... it’s because the horse was busy, because he wanted to eat the food and didn’t care.” Kumani was only able to describe the horse’s *un*-helpful actions.

Halima was able to consider which actions of the horse might classify it as a helper. Her understanding of how the helper related to the whole of the story was developing, and sometimes she was able to draw several relations. In her group, she laid out the function cards, and thought about what would happen if the helper was removed. She traced the horse’s actions back in the story’s chronological time, to the beginning. She thought that if the horse (as helper) was removed at the beginning, then the dragon slayer would not be able to ride the horse. However, this was not primarily how the horse functioned in relation to the hero and the want. Yet she was very confident about her idea and moved around the classroom to share it with others. Her idea appeared at some point in almost all the other students’ discussions with peers, as in these statements:

Halima: It would take him [dragon slayer] forever to get to the dragons ... he will walk.
Later,

Mahirah: The dragon slayer wouldn’t, can’t go on places, to kill dragons.

Helen: The dragon slayer couldn’t have nobody to ride on … would just walk himself.

Nina: The hero doesn’t get to the desert, quickly, he will walk and walk.

In their individual written responses, many students also used Halima’s idea. However, many of these students understood the narrative relationships in greater depth and so they also included other ideas in their discussions and their writing. For example, while they worked in their group, Anna and Mahirah laid out the narrative function cards, as such:

home - hero - villain - move - lack - helper - token - HOME

Then they discussed the effect of removing the helper (horse):

Anna: I'm going to say that if the horse didn't help the dragon slayer, then, the dragon slayer will not have a family and not quit his job ... he is going to help him get this … a family (*she shows the lack card*)

Mahirah: They can never go to the lack!

Mahirah removed the HOME (satisfied lack) card:

home - hero - villain - move - lack - helper - token - HOME

They continued:

Anna: He [horse] helped him [dragon slayer] with moving him ... when the dragon slayer was pushing him, let's go, then the horse pushes him to go [to the baby dragon].

Mahirah: He wouldn't have a family ... the horse gave him advice to just have a family (*she called the pushing actions 'advice' by the horse*)

Mahirah and Anna removed the token (“advice”) and helper cards:

home - hero - villain - move - lack - helper - token - HOME

Then Mahirah moved the lack card far from the others:

home - hero - villain - move ---------------------------------------- lack

Mahirah and Anna built on each other’s ideas, used the function cards to think relationally, and figured out some of the other functions that were connected to the helper.
Kaanan sat quietly at a table while the rest of his group members talked. The group dialogue was lively and excited as they tried to figure out how removing the helper’s actions would affect the rest of the story. Kaanan listened to the group’s conversation and contributed his thoughts once in a while. It was interesting to watch Kaanan work out his thinking through the function cards as he listened to parts of the conversation. He laid out the cards in a slightly different order than did Mahirah and Anna, placing the move before the villain:

home - hero - move - villain - lack - helper - token - HOME

As the other group members spoke about how the dragon slayer would not satisfy what was lacking and make it home, Kaanan turned over the lack and HOME cards:

home - hero - move - villain - lack - helper - token - HOME

Kaanan then picked up the hero card, like an action figure, and moved it back and forth from home to villain saying, “so this goes on and on and on”. He was showing that without the horse’s help, the dragon slayer would continue to move from home to dragon and back home until another dragon needed to be slain. He then turned the helper and token (advice) cards over:

home - hero - move - villain - lack - helper - token - HOME

Kaanan contemplated removing the move card, which seemed like a contradictory thing to do, since he had just said that the dragon slayer would go back and forth from home to dragon. It seemed that the dragon slayer would be moving often. However, Kaanan was beginning to understand the relations of the move function: the move is functionally related to the hero and the lack. He asked, “Then what’s the point of moves?” Indeed, if the hero will no longer be able to achieve what is wanted, why move? Even after Oma replied, “Yeah, but it’s still a move”, Kaanan turned over the move card.

home - hero - move - villain - lack - helper - token - HOME

As the others continued to talk, Kaanan told his group, “What if the dragon blows fire and gets the hero? And uses his shield too much. It will be red and all burned up.” He then turned over the hero card:

home - hero - move - villain - lack - helper - token - HOME
He continued, “They [dragons] will destroy the homes”, and then he turned over the home card.

home - hero - move - villain - lack - helper - token - HOME

Finally Kaanan concluded that if the horse did not help the dragon slayer, then eventually only the villainous dragons would be left. All other functions in the story would be removed. He was able to follow the conversations of his group members but then he went beyond their discussions and connected the helper function to every other aspect of the story. The other group members, Oma, Maysun and Raakhi, could not articulate all the relations that Kaanan identified, however they understood his final ‘only the villains are left’ outcome. They articulated it in their own way:

Oma: Another dragon shows up.

Maysun: Because the villain … she has babies … the baby will follow his mother.

Oma: I know what she is trying to say. Since the babies are born from the mother, maybe the babies saw the mother doing all the killing so maybe the babies will follow along.

Raakhi expanded Kaanan’s conclusion by writing, “The baby dragons will destroy the world.”

4.11 Instructing with a Conceptual Literary Framework

Over the course of the school year, the teachers introduced their students to the fictional narrative structures in step-by-step increments. How they did this was determined by three factors: our group discussions, the way that each teacher felt best suited the grade and development level of her students and, the directions that classroom learning and discussions took. There was not much difference between the teachers in the sequence in which structures were introduced (see Appendix I), but there was a difference in when each teacher introduced them. Aimee introduced all eight narrative functions within the first two or three weeks of school, whereas Lydia’s students explored the concepts at a much slower pace.
Aimee and her students read all four stories from the teacher discussion groups, whereas Lydia left out *Mufaro’s Beautiful Daughters* (Steptoe, 1987), because she was working with the grade 1 students at a slower pace than the other teachers. Aimee introduced all the narrative structures by their names, whereas Lydia did not introduce the plot *Overcoming the Monster* by name, until a few months into the year. She chose instead to work with this plot’s functional relationships of ‘the hero wants, but the villain blocks the way’. Throughout the year, both teachers read some of the same stories but also interacted with different texts with their students (see Appendix J).

### 4.11.1 Narrative concepts and the teachers.

The teachers took our story study sessions and divided or expanded them into many step-by-step lessons and activities for the students. Before each teacher meeting, I read the stories and prepared notes to aid our discussions. During our meetings, we read the stories or watched the films, then laid out the narrative structure cards (on the table or interactive board) and discussed the structures, drew relations to and developed our own understandings. Lydia and the others felt that it was “important [for the teachers] to sit down and talk about the story before you begin with the children.” Following our meetings, the teachers, likewise, read (or reread) their chosen stories, and prepared their own notes and learning objectives. Lydia’s notes were quite detailed and included descriptions, categorizations, and a range of questions and possible relational responses. They also reflected what the students had learned previously and the new concepts that she would introduce or develop with the new story or lesson. Sometimes she wrote her dialogue ideas and objectives on stickies and stuck them to the back of the book she was about to read with the students. An example of this is in Appendix K.

Both teachers followed a typical lesson structure that included instruction with dialogue, practice activities and regrouping to share and consolidate student learning. In the lessons that I observed, they tended to differ slightly in their approaches to student activities, which may have been due to the developmental differences between the two grades. Although Lydia varied the literary activities from lesson to lesson, within an individual language period she typically gave the students a similar activity. She designed the activities to help the students make literary relations and to allow for differentiated responses. The
activity asking “How might the (character) help Thomas?” serves as a good example. Here students could identify a character already mentioned in the story or they could create and embed a new one. They could also draw as many relations as they were able, depending on how they understood the relationships between structures.

Aimee began the school year the same way, but as she put it, soon “moved from the specific to open-ended which allowed for a range of activities that met the needs of all students”. She used the concepts to shape a range of different activities, which she introduced one at a time. As the year progressed, the students could choose these different activities to express how they understood different texts. Some of these activities were: retelling using the functions, using Venn Diagrams to compare two stories, creating plot lines, composing character and action poems, writing letters to characters, dramatizing story scenes, creating a chart or table to contrast images from stories (as the ‘world we want’ or the ‘world we don’t want’), developing a ‘what-if’ web, and writing a paragraph about the story’s plot structure. These choices provided the students with a means to explore the structures and forms within or between stories.

Over the course of the year, through our four meetings and all the practice with the students in the classrooms, the teachers’ own literary understandings developed. The first meeting involved the teachers becoming familiar with the structural concepts (framework) and seeing them in the particular forms in *The Boy and the Giants* (Moodie, 1993). Our second meeting using the story *Mufaro’s Beautiful Daughters* (Steptoe, 1987), involved a little more discussion around story plots, specifically using two different plot structures to understand more of the relationships within the story. For days following our second meeting, the teachers continued to discuss which plot they thought was most significant. They would meet up and talk to each other about the evidence they had to support their plot ideas. By the time we met again to discuss *Dragon Slayer* (Kuczera, 2004), the teachers easily moved back and forth between different plot structures, using them to understand different aspects of the story. For example, the teachers used the rebirth plot structure to relate several aspects of the story, as the following quotes show:

If the dragon had not died, he [dragon slayer] would not have been reborn.
He goes through that dark cavern.
He’s going through the birthing canal.
That’s pretty narrow.
… and he comes out with a child.
There’s his cry, when you’re born.
That’s his birth cry!
Born again.

Interestingly, in their class discussions, these relations around Rebirth were never discussed. *Dragon Slayer* (Kuczera, 2004) was mainly discussed in relation to the Redemption and Overcoming the Monster plots. The teachers used our meetings to develop their own understandings so they could better respond to their students. The teachers tended to use the structures to open the dialogue, and then helped to develop or extend the relations that the students were making.

4.11.2 Transferring structures by the teachers. The teachers used the narrative structures to frame how they approached most of the texts they read throughout the year, including multimedia and nonfiction narratives. In our group meetings, we developed possible questions to guide their instruction, student activities and class discussions. They used many of the questions that we developed for the focus stories, and transferred them to the other stories that they read. They adapted structural questions to the particular forms of all the texts they read with their students (or watched).

Both teachers phrased their questions and response prompts to encourage the students to draw relations. Some examples were:

- What were some of the actions of Thomas? *(followed by further prompts to relate the hero to the animals who would be future helpers)*
- What kind of person must Thomas be to perform these actions? *(followed by prompts to relate character traits to the hero function; then further prompts to contrast the hero with the villain)*
- How might Thomas try to find Kate? Who might help him? How so? *(these questions help relate hero to want, helpers, villain and moves)*
• How was the sea princess a helper? (followed by prompts to relate these actions to the hero, villain, and want)
• How was the sea princess a villain? (followed by prompts to relate these actions to the hero, villain, and want)

Many questions were phrased to create ‘what-if’ scenarios, for example:

What if the villain blocks the way?
What if we change the form of hero, villain and want?
What if the eagle helps Thomas?
What if another helper helped Thomas?
What if we think of the sea princess as a helper?
What if the cranes did not help Yoshiko?
What if Qalupalik took place in another setting?

These ‘what-if’ questions helped the students investigate how one aspect of a story (e.g., the cranes) related to all other parts and the whole. These kinds of questions frequently presented a new possible scenario for the students to think about using the structures and relations they already understood. Both teachers wove these kinds of questions into their lessons, class discussions, and small group and independent activities.

Although I only observed language lessons, Aimee told us that she was using the conceptual framework in other areas of instruction. She told the group: “I also found that I used the framework beyond books, like behavioural or in a social situation. And math, and other curriculum areas … we were able to translate those ideas into science, social studies. [We used the] same language right across the board.”

4.11.3 The teachers’ role in dialogue. The classroom instruction and discourse was both inductive and deductive in nature. It was deductive because the teachers understood the concepts that they wanted the students to explore and they planned their questioning to encourage relations to be drawn around the concepts. However, the questions they asked were primarily open-ended, creating an inductive process for the students. The students were either exploring new concepts or familiar concepts in new ways. During class discussions, the teachers never knew the precise direction that the students’ dialogue would take. Instead
they asked questions (or gave information) to help the students discover and create new
relations.

Both teachers followed a similar questioning pattern during discussions. They asked
questions to identify or describe a structural aspect from the story. They followed student
responses with prompts for clarification or to flesh out the ideas (e.g., how so? or explain
further). They asked questions to draw further relations (e.g., how does that relate to the
hero?). They asked questions to identify which narrative concepts the students were
discussing and they asked questions to identify which forms the structures took. For example,
if a student responded by saying, “both heroes want something”, then the teachers would ask
for the supporting evidence from the particular texts they were reading.

The following serves as an example of the teachers’ questioning through one topic
from a Dragon Slayer (Kuczera, 2004) discussion. Here Aimee asked an open-ended
question to elicit descriptions or observations from the students. As they responded, she
prompted for details for further description or new vocabulary.

What do you notice about the land? *(open question)*
What *do* you see? *(prompts for description)*
Can you describe these plants for me?
What else?
How do they look?
Think about another way to describe them.
What else?

She followed with questions to help students draw relations, moving toward the significance
of their observation:

What do you think those things are related to?
Who might those things be related to?

She also summarized what the students’ dialogue revealed, for example: “So the land is
related to what he’s wearing. The director made some very good choices to help us
understand what is happening in the story.” Over the course of the class discussions, Aimee
repeated this pattern with individual students and would extend it with several students responding.

Lydia asked similar types of questions. For example, in a discussion comparing two stories, she began with an open-question: “What is the same about Heckedy Peg and The Wolf and the Seven Little Kids?” She then prompted for more details:

What else?

What happens to the wolf? (*she prompted for details*)

Where does he get knocked out?

Do you remember how he falls in the well?

How does the wolf fall into the water?

Do you remember what makes him tumble into the water?

And then she returned to the original question: “Anything else that is similar?”

Lydia also wove cloze statements into the discourse to help students clarify important story relationships, for example:

Alex: She wants to be a monkey.
Teacher: She want to be their ______
Alex: … baby.

In between the questions, both teachers wove instruction. For example, Lydia drew attention to the different form the hero-helper relationships took in *The Boy and the Giants* (Moodie, 1993), *Nanny Goat and the Seven Kids*, and *The Hungry Giant of the Tundra* (Sloat, 1993): “In Thomas and Kate, the reason the three helpers helped Thomas is because Thomas helped them. Did the children help the chickadee? Did the children help the crane?”

Aimee summarized and clarified ideas from *Dragon Slayer* (Kuczer, 2004), to help students discover new relations: “He’s moving away from that one joyful thing there. He’s actually leaving that place. So all these choices … the director made to help us understand what the hero really wants. So what does he really want?”

The teachers used the structural and relational questions to help students keep the discussions focused on topics. The announcement that one student made to the class, “Guess what? I have a necklace made of pearls”, serves as an example of a comment that could have
changed the class focus to ‘jewelry’ or ‘things from the story that I have at home’. Lydia helped refocus by bringing this shared thought back to the story structures, specifically the function of the pearls in the story: “That’s what Thomas has to find now to free himself and to free Kate. So the giantess lets him go only if he finds the necklace.”

The teachers also wove less-open questions into the discussions to help students ‘see’ a relationship, or clarify one. With *The Boy and the Giants* (Moodie, 1993), Lydia asked:

Teacher: Let’s think … he has to go find pearls … pearls are underwater … who might help him?

Alex: Eagle.

Teacher: The pearls are underwater. What do eagles do?

Students: Fly.

Teacher: They fly. They fly in the water?

Students: No.

Teacher: They fly in the …

Students: … air.

The teachers’ responses during our own story analyses (during our group meetings) were surprisingly similar to the students’ responses. As we listened to a story (we read to each other) or watched a film, the teachers used the concepts to make connections, much like their students would do in class. For example, while we watched *Dragon Slayer* (Kuczera, 2004), I recorded the teachers’ spontaneous comments as we neared the end of the movie, for example:

You see, all the armor is off at the end.
The helmet is gone at the end.
The prickly spikes are gone.
There’s the mallet instead of the sword.
He looks like the bird out of the cage.
He wants to create. His job was to destroy.
There are a lot of similar scenes in Ice Age.
Is the dragon the monster?
He is pretty monstrous himself too.
The dragon didn’t actually get in the way of this freedom, right?
He is the dragon.
The baby is the mirror … he can see himself.

The teachers’ understandings shaped how they were able to facilitate discussions and respond to students. However, they did not ‘tell’ the students what they understood, they helped develop the students’ thinking. For example, during a grade 2 discussion around the contrasting characters of Nyasha and Manyara, the students generated the following list:

- Manyara: bad temper, mean/yells, wants to be queen, sneaky, greedy, ruthless, selfish, evil, arrogant, disrespectful, two-faced
- Nyasha: cheerful, sings, kind, ignores her sisters mean words, compassionate, grows food, not afraid of snakes, honest, shares food, grateful, comforts, brave

Of these 23 words and phrases, only six (in italics) were the same as those generated during the teacher group meeting. During her class discussion, Aimee did not tell the students what we understood from our meetings. She facilitated the discourse and activities that supported and encouraged the students to draw their own relations and understandings.

During our final meeting (focus group), Lydia stated that the open questions we generated served as the “vehicle to get [students] to that higher order thinking”. Aimee agreed, that the concepts, which framed the teachers questions and the students’ responses, “elevated their level of discussion.” Aimee found that “eventually, [she] didn’t have to ask the questions anymore; [students] began to do it for themselves.” Lydia thought the teachers’ discourse questions became “the beginning of [the students] asking questions.”
5. Discussion

My research operationalized an original structural framework of how literature is organized to convey meaning. This framework was intended to be implemented by elementary teachers as a way to practically bring together the literary aspects of their language instruction. It was also designed to be easily understood by children of all ages as a way to make the subject of study, language and literature, comprehensible. My study investigated how teachers might use literary structures to engage their students in relational (higher order) thinking and deepen their comprehension of the texts they read. Conducting a formative experiment, I collaborated and reflected with primary classroom teachers. The teachers went beyond simply replicating an instructional approach and implemented it in a way that became their own. My research sought to answer these two questions: 1) How do elementary students interact with and respond to stories by means of literary structures? 2) How can teachers work with children to analyze how a story is coded to convey meaning?

Through my inductive analysis, I observed a very close connection between how the teachers approached their instruction and interactions with the students, and how students approached their interactions to the stories they read, in response to the literary structural framework. The teachers engaged in lengthy discussions, during our four group meetings, which helped them learn about the literary structures, deepen their understandings of the particular texts and literature, and note the processes of relational thinking. These discussions led to the development of open-ended inquiry questions for their students. They used these questions in their classrooms to promote student discussions, which became an important way that the students developed their understandings of a text and literature. Through the literary structures, the students and teachers deepened their understandings of the texts they were reading. The students approached texts by means of the structures and the teachers used the structures to encourage the relational thinking that led students to discover layers of meaning in their reading. The students used the structures to help develop their thinking, and drew relations to think about what they were reading. The teachers used the structures and relations to help students, as a group and individually, draw deep and significant relationships.
How the students interacted with and responded to the literary framework was very closely connected to how the teachers used this framework to work with their students. Therefore, I discuss how my data answered both research questions under the categories of literary comprehension, learning with literary structures, transferring the structures to serve understanding, relational thinking and classroom dialogue.

5.1 Literary Comprehension

5.1.1 Subject knowledge. My research supports the idea that, “understanding the underlying fundamental structures makes a subject more comprehensible” (Bruner, 1963, p. 23). If students are to move toward developing ‘expertise’ in the various disciplines, they require “both a deepening of the information base and the development of a conceptual framework for that subject matter” (National Research Council, 1999, p. 13). By studying and working with the structures of literature, the grade 1 and 2 students were developing deep subject-matter understanding. The students had developed an understanding of the conceptual literary framework, which they used to make sense of stories that were told through different media. They could identify and discuss complex ideas and relationships within each story they read.

The teachers and students in this research did not approach the literary concepts as isolated facts to learn (e.g., by rote). Each concept was explored in the context of a text and in connection to other texts. The narrative framework was carried through the entire school year as students explored many examples of the concepts and developed an understanding of the complexities. By means of the narrative framework, the students integrated new information as they read, and thought back to previously read texts, to relate old information in new ways. Their inquiries and investigations connected one text to another over the entire school year. For example, the students began their understandings of the structures of ‘hero’, ‘villain’, and ‘want’ from the particular forms they took in the first story they read together. From there, they explored these ideas in every text they read from September through June. They broadened and deepened their understandings of how these structures could differ in the forms they took, and how they related to each other, in and across texts, in increasingly more complex ways. These kind of connections are important for any subject matter to be explored
and understood in depth, which is considered to be vital in discussions about 21st century education (Scardamalia, 2001).

5.1.2 Internal narrative relations. Consistent with Beck and McKeown’s (2001) research, the grade 1 and 2 students in my study were engaged in analytic talk about story ideas by constructing meaning from the language in the texts. The narrative framework we implemented helped students move deep into stories, so that their layered understandings came from the myriad of relations they could draw within each text. However, my study significantly expanded on Beck and McKeown’s research. Because the narrative framework was derived from theories and experiences of how stories have been organized to convey meaning, the narrative functions and plot categories did more than provide a way into the important story ideas. These structures became the literary ideas that the students explored, so that our implementation went beyond engaging students in individual texts. The structures were effective for exploring whole stories as forms of specific plots, and single stories as forms of the broader idea of ‘story’.

5.1.3 Content understood by means of structures. Research has shown some beneficial effects of using story grammars as a strategy to aid reading comprehension (Dymock, 2007; Pearson & Hamm, 2005; Stevens et al., 2010). The narrative framework, developed and implemented for my research was concerned with how fiction is organized, however, it is not a story grammar strategy. This narrative framework was developed from narratology research (Lévi-Strauss, 1958; Propp, 1928; Saussure, 1915) and literary studies (Booker, 2004; Frye, 1957; Polti, 1945) and has been grounded in the experiences of simple and complex texts. Beyond previous grammar models, my research has shown this framework to be useful for approaching texts in two ways. First, much like reading a sentence, students were able to read the chronological, linear sequence of narrative functions through the story. Students could understand how story parts related to one another as they unfolded in time. Second, the students were also able to read the story patterns. Structural narrative parts were understood as functional and relational. Each function was defined in relation to the other functions, including relations of combination and opposition (Lévi-
Strauss, 1958; Saussure, 1915). These kinds of relations also gave the students a way to see and explore the significance of the patterns within and across stories.

The significance of other story elements was also explored by relating them to the structural patterns. For example, the students could take the functions *Thomas, Kate* and the *giant* out of their sequential order to study how they combined and contrasted with each other. Then they reworked these functions back into the sequence of the story, now with a deeper understanding, to draw further relations to other aspects of the story (e.g., helpers, tokens, moves, home). The structural framework was an effective way to uncover layers to the linear (chronological) narrative movement and the layers of significance within a story. These structural patterns were also transferred to make sense of new stories thus connecting one story to another, and creating a way for layers of meaning to be uncovered intertextually.

With this new literary framework, the narrative functions gave the students a way to fully explore the ‘content’ of stories and discover its significance. All aspects of a story’s ‘content’ had the potential to be included (and much of it was) in the students’ structural analyses and discussions. This addressed a concern voiced in previous research that a focus on structure may serve to de-emphasize or ignore the content of a text (Schmitt & O’Brien, 1986). In my study, students did not abstract content (elements, themes or images) from the stories they were reading. Instead, meaning was constructed from the text by following the structural relationships. For example, students did not attempt to understand ‘greed’ and ‘selfishness’, or ‘food’ and ‘hunger’ by removing these ideas from their context in the *The Boy and the Giants* (Moodie, 1993). Students moved toward understanding these important human concerns by studying how they functioned within the story. They explored the contrast between harmful intentions (e.g., putting Thomas under a spell so that he forgot his loved one), that were hidden under outwardly kind actions (e.g., "The sea monster put putyfull (*plentiful*) food that Thomes cant find the trueth"). Students also investigated the contrasting actions of different characters (e.g., “Thomas does not waste food” but "The giant is greedy"). The abstract and complex ideas of greed and selfishness were explored meaningfully through the forms they were given through this simple tale.
Symbols were also explored using the narrative structures. For example, the brief moment in *Dragon Slayer* (Kuczer, 2004), when the slayer throws his shield away, was noticed by the students and became a topic of conversation because of how it related to the ‘hero’ and ‘want’. By drawing relations around the dragon slayer and his underlying desire for love and family, both the grade 1 and 2 students constructed some understanding of the shield’s significance. The change in combinations from “shield = slayer + destroying dragons” to “discarded shield = slayer + caring for dragons” was uncovered by means of the structural pattern of “item = hero + want”. By recognizing these kinds of relationships, even different symbols from different stories could be compared.

### 5.1.4 Moving from simple to complex in narrative.

The literary structures of my research provided a way for students to uncover the relational complexities in the stories they were reading, whether they were stories with an elaborate series of events, or seemingly simple stories with implicit complexities. In previous research, Schmitt and O’Brien (1986) cautioned against the use of story grammars because they may not be transferrable to a large number of stories, especially more complex stories, and that students may, in the end, only be able to deal with stories that have the ‘ideal’ structure. Other research has also suggested that previous story structure models have not provided a sufficient framework for understanding more complex texts (Dymock, 2007; Thompson, 2008). For example, previous models may have outlined some of the ways narratives are ordered chronologically but have not provided a way into the significance of the images, symbols or other elements, and how these relate to the structural parts. In addition, narrative ‘grammar’ has often been analyzed separately from the meaning of the story, resulting in attempts to understand parts of the content by removing (abstracting) it from significant relationships within the text.

The narrative framework we used in my research went beyond previous story models. In both classrooms I observed complex analyses and elaborate discussions about literary ideas. Some of these ideas were found in what initially seemed to be simple stories, for example, *The Three Billy Goats Gruff* or *Mufaro’s Beautiful Daughters* (Steptoe, 1987). The students drew complex relations between seemingly disparate stories by means of common plot structures, and could see several plot structures in single stories. The structural
framework provided a simple way into understanding the complexities that exist in stories and complexities in the ideas that move from story to story. Complex stories are, in fact, built from repeated structural patterns, embedded into one another (Propp, 1928). So even the very young students in my study were able to investigate the embedded complexities in the stories they read. *The Boy and the Giants* (Moodie, 1993) can serve as one example. When Thomas dove to the bottom of the sea, this move was simply a smaller embedded pattern of the larger story pattern of ‘hero-want-villain-helper’. In this case, the larger pattern took the form of Thomas (hero) wanting to get Kate (want) back from the giant (villain) with help from the eagle (helper). However, Thomas was caught by the giantess, and thus a move was necessary, whereby the ‘hero-want-villain-helper’ pattern was repeated twice. The first move occurred when Thomas (hero) wanted pearls (want) for the giantess (villain) so the otter (helper) brought him to the bottom of the sea. This pattern occurred again when Thomas (hero) wanted pearls (want) but the sea princess (villain) got in the way until the salmon (helper) broke the spell with the nettle and returned Thomas to the surface. At this point the story resumed.

By thinking relationally with structural patterns, the students were able to competently and meaningfully uncover complexities, and they were developing the means by which they could approach longer, more complex and more psychological stories. The grade 2 students used the narrative framework to make sense of *The Maestro* (Palmer, 2003), a much longer and more complex story that took many days to read together. They approached this novel in the same manner as they approached tales, short stories and nonfiction narratives. Toward the end of the school year, some grade 1 students were beginning to independently categorize the plots and analyze the functions in the chapter books that they were beginning to read on their own.

Our literary approach helped students understand stories within their context of literature, so that a single story’s meaning was derived in part from the meaningful patterns found across other stories. An example of this occurred when the grade 1 students looked beyond the explicitly stated want by Yoshiko, “Can I be your baby?” and saw the ‘driving’

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12 Stories that have more character development, and consist of moves that have internal changes associated with the external, physical moves made by the characters.
want as another layer in the story’s meaning. From previous stories, the students knew that sometimes characters were unaware of their own deeper desires. In *The Crane Girl* (Charles, 1999), Yoshiko, did not know what it was that she deeply wanted. She did not *really* want to be a baby but wished to regain a sense of her family’s love. Deeper layers of meaning could be uncovered by the relational patterns seen across stories. *The Three Billy Goats Gruff* seemed like a simple tale, but the narrative functions and plot structures uncovered the more complex and universal ideas, such as power struggles, greed and hunger. These concerns are not simple, yet, in this case, they had been given form through a simple tale about goats and trolls. The literary framework was able to uncover layers to even simple tales in part because it is rooted in primary human needs, human wants and desires, and human relationships with others, time and place.

5.1.5 The whole narrative and its parts. The grade 1 and 2 students created plot lines for the stories that they read as one way to think about how the parts related to form the whole of the story. Our story plotting differed significantly from story diagramming (Zahoor & Janjua, 2013), a strategy sometimes used with traditional grammar models (Mandler & Johnson, 1977), and similar to sentence parsing processes. These types of tree diagrams are sometimes used to analyze how story constituents fit together. However, they are complicated and, as Zahoor and Janjua (2013) found with their analysis of *The Gift of the Magi*, the diagram of even a single short story can span several pages. Our literary approach differed in significant and intentional ways. Instead of ‘diagramming’ stories, the grade 1 and 2 students ‘plotted’ them. They identified events by the ‘move’ function, which was simply an identification of new actions, and possibly new characters, in a new place and time. For each event, the students discussed the relationships between the setting, characters and actions as they related to the ‘hero’ and ‘want’. The students ordered the events in chronological sequence and, very importantly, by their significance to the ‘hero’ and ‘want’ functions. When looking at a completed plot line, an entire story could be visualized, with the significant descents and ascents emphasized. All at once (like a photograph) the students could see how a story unfolded toward the outcome of satisfying or failing to satisfy the desire, and they could see the difficulties encountered along the way.
Our plot lines created a single image for each story, in such a way that one could be superimposed on, or placed beside another to reveal similarities and differences between stories. Plot lines revealed patterns that helped students see similarities in stories that were formally very different. The students plotted and compared stories often, discussing how one story had lower descents than another, or more down or up movements than another. In addition, they saw how very different stories followed the same comedic arc, with the highest point signifying the satisfied ‘lack’. The plot lines and analyses became a means to construct meaning about individual stories and larger story patterns. In fact, through their text experiences, the students noticed that stories tended to either move toward satisfying a ‘want’ (desire) or they did not. They noticed these contrasting categories of plot and even began to form questions about plot structures (e.g., Keeran asked about stories that might go “down, down, down” and Neela requested to hear more Rags to Riches stories as well as contrasting “Riches to Rags” stories).

5.2 Learning with Literary Structures

In my study, the literary framework helped teachers organize their instruction around the fundamental concepts (structures) of literature (an important aspect of language). The students studied how language works through its structural concepts. Vygotsky (1986) showed that instruction with concepts is vital to the cognitive development of a child. Concepts help create the structures for the child’s own thinking and promote further concept formation. The structural framework we implemented did not change over the school year or between grades, but because concepts are dynamic and flexible, the students could use the concepts to develop meaning. This meant that the students’ understandings changed and developed, including their understandings of the concepts, through their interactions with texts, their peers and their teachers.

5.2.1 Concepts in context: The universal and the particular. Our literary framework provided the students with concepts (Vygotsky, 1986), which they explored and understood through their experience with individual stories. Vygotsky (1986) wrote that the process of concept formation “appears as a movement of thought within the pyramid of concepts, constantly alternating between two directions: from the particular to the general,
and from the general to the particular” (p. 143). With my research, the students’ literary studies followed these precise movements as they inquired into the general structures and the particular forms they took. Every aspect of the narrative framework was introduced by the teachers only in the context of individual stories, and further explored and expanded through relations to other stories. This movement between the particular and the general was observed in all the classroom discussions. When students gave structural responses, the teachers asked for supporting evidence in the particular forms these structures took. If students showed a textual relation between forms, the teachers asked for corresponding structural relations. This movement between structure and form (general and particular) was seen sometimes within individual students. At other times, students as a group worked to articulate these connections.

Students also moved back and forth between the broader meaning of a concept as it would apply across many texts, and the very particular meaning of a concept within a single text. Vygotsky (1986) referred to this fluctuation in meaning as such: “A word in a context means both more and less than the same word in isolation: more, because it acquires new context; less, because its meaning is limited and narrowed by the context” (p. 245). In my research, the students began their understanding of the concept ‘hero’ through the goat characters in *The Three Billy Goats Gruff*. They could repeat a definition for ‘hero’, but they interchanged the words *goats* and *hero* frequently as they discussed the story. Although the students could generate many rich descriptions about these goat-heroes, their understanding was limited to the goat-context of this one story. As they explored new stories, their understanding of ‘hero’ expanded, taking on more functional and relational qualities.

Over the year, the students applied the narrative concepts to understand an increasing number of contexts, which in turn affected how they understood what each concept could mean. For example, this was observed in both classes as the meaning of ‘hero’ began to include characters who did not start out ‘good’ but later were reborn or redeemed. The more stories they experienced and the more contexts in which they could ‘see’ the structures, the simpler and more functional their definitions became. As one example, the students were initially given a simple definition for ‘villain’ in that, “a villain blocks the hero from getting
what is wanted”. Because they could only understand this structure through particular forms, they understood the ‘villain’ as having many more qualities than this simple definition suggested. These were typically external qualities (e.g., they thought a villain was ugly, hairy, big, a monster, and so on). However, by the end of the school year, the students categorized a large number of characters as ‘villains’, by both broadening and simplifying what ‘villain’ meant. The numerous external characteristics had been replaced with a functional description. They had returned to the initial definition, but only after testing it with story data and developing their own understandings of it. The meanings of the concepts broadened so the students could identify disparate images, objects or words as forms of the same structures. For example, they could see ‘villain’ in a troll, giants, witches, a sea princess, a crane, a fire engine, a bomb, a bully, and jealousy; and ‘helper’ in an eagle, an otter, a fish, a stove, an old woman, a river of milk, an oven, and a crane. In the context of a single story, these concepts were limited and narrowed, yet richer in description, as students made sense of the particular relationships between the forms each structure took.

**5.2.1.1 Literary relevance through the universal and the particular.** When students came across a story with characters or images that were not part of their ‘real-world’ experiences, they could relate to the text by means of the structures. For example, none of the students in this study were Inuit, nor were they fathers. Yet they were able to relate to the Inuit father in *Qalupalik* (Papatsie, 2010) because he functioned (in their analysis) as the ‘hero’, much like many other characters they had encountered. Likewise, only some of the children in the two classrooms were African girls, yet all of the children were engaged in the story of *Mufaro’s Beautiful Daughters* (Steptoe, 1987). In these stories, the students were able to access something universal, which took different forms in the different stories (e.g., an Inuit father or an African daughter).

They were able to relate to a character who desired something and faced obstacles that blocked the way. Just as importantly, students were also able to relate to the particular forms by means of the universal structures. By seeing the universal in the particular, and the particular as a form of what is universal, the students had a way to relate to the common human concerns that were embedded in the very different stories they read. All the students
could relate to a character who desires something, although none of the students were seeking to be a Queen, as were Mufaro’s daughters. None of the students had ever been fathers searching for their lost sons, yet all could relate to the universal human concerns around love and loss. Likewise, it is unlikely that any of the students will meet a sea-princess or monster, yet they all understood that there are ‘characters’ in the world who will deceive others for their own selfish gains. As Vygotsky (1986) stated: “a word derives its sense from the sentence, which, in turn, gets its sense from the paragraph, the paragraph from the book, the book from all the works of the author” (p. 245). And as Frye (1957) might add, the author from the whole of the body of literature. And so the particular forms derive meaning from universal concerns, but these universals can only be expressed and understood through the particular forms. The back and forth movement between particular and universal is fundamental to literature, and the narrative framework that we implemented was shown to be a very effective way for students to make sense of this.

5.2.2 Fluidity between inductive and deductive learning. The conceptual narrative approach that we implemented for my research provided an ideal way for students and teachers to alternate between “inductive experiences and deductive principles” (Frye, 1957, p. 22). The grade 1 and 2 students were investigating structures that had already been ‘established’ yet they were doing so by actively discovering relationships that were new to them. Bruner (1963) likened the psychological position of a child who is facing a new concept to that of the original thinker, in that they both proceed inductively. The original thinker figures out new relationships and discovers new unity in data, while the child figures out relationships that are new to him or her. While Frye (1988) agreed, he also noted that education at the elementary level is “naturally of a strong deductive cast” (p. 52), because it activates a child’s inquiry into a conception of the structures and principles of a subject.

Our literary approach took a deductive shape in that the teachers engaged their students in the study of a system of communication. The literary framework was developed from observations of structures that already organize stories. The students were introduced to these structures with simple relational definitions and explored them through examples. The students used the structures to figure out how elements within a new story functioned and
how they related to one another and to the whole of the story. The concepts that the students were learning, were understood through their context in stories and in relation to other stories. For each new text that the students experienced, they applied the structural framework to construct meaning not only of the text, but of the concepts themselves. Because each structural concept related to others as part of a whole, they could not be understood in isolation. Students developed their understanding of a single concept as it related to other concepts. They took what they understood about the concepts generally, and made inferences about the particular forms they were reading, based on their analysis of the textual information. The students applied deductive reasoning as they read.

Our study was designed so that, even though the teachers were learning this new approach, they had developed some understanding of literary structures that they brought to bear on their planning and instruction. We can assume that the teachers had a deeper knowledge of the subject than their students. They developed inquiry questions to help their students move to deep levels of understanding and they planned clear learning objectives for their lessons and the students’ activities.

Participating students were introduced to concepts with ‘working’ definitions, which appeared to be more of deductive approach. However, they used their experiences with stories to draw inferences and expand their ideas about the meanings of each structural concept. It was through working with forms (like data), that the students clarified their conceptions of the structures and came to their own understandings.

The narrative framework was comprised of very few concepts, so it was easy for the students to learn and apply. This meant that the teachers were not introducing new concepts every day. Instead the students explored new forms of the structures in new stories, used what they knew about the structures to draw new relationships, and further expanded their understanding of the structures. This was observed in both classrooms, frequently, as students shared ideas or relationships that they had just noticed in the texts they were reading (their data).

However, both classroom teachers had clear learning goals in mind. Because these goals involved relational thinking, students brought textual elements together and connected
them from one story to another, often in ways that were not predicted by their teachers. The students were discovering the unity in stories for themselves.

5.2.3 Structures differentiate instruction and learning. The results of my study showed that the structural literary concepts helped the teachers work with each student at his or her level of learning, while at the same time unifying the range of understandings within their classrooms. Vygotsky (1978) called a child’s intellectual learning space the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), and defined it as “the distance between the actual developmental level [of the child] as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers” (p. 86). While all students (and even the teachers and myself) were studying the same subject and reading some of the same texts, the structural approach created room for a breadth and depth of responses. Both the grade 1 and 2 teachers were able to organize their different instructions and activities around the same literary concepts. They used the same terms and structural relations across their different activities and discussions. Furthermore, all students in both grades participated in the discussions and all the activities, and all students spoke about and applied the same conceptual framework. What differed between students (within each classroom and between each classroom) were the relationships and meanings that they were able to uncover or create. These relations showed the depth and breadth of the groups’ and of each child’s understanding.

A structural approach also made it easy for the teachers to formatively assess individual students’ understandings and then guide them further in their learning. For example, following lessons, Lydia gave mini-lessons to students, helping each one extend from the narrative relationships they were able to draw. Aimee was able to effectively organize both heterogeneous and homogeneous student learning groups, unifying them by the literary structures and varying them by the depth or breadth of inquiry.

Organizing activities and discussions around structures meant that all students could respond at their own level of understanding. A student who was not yet able to apply a concept, and was instead making more superficial associations, could still participate in the
same study as another who was already extending the concepts. Even within a small work group, a student with a partial grasp of a concept (e.g., Halima, who could not think about the horse’s actions beyond the first event) could share ideas with a peer who demonstrated innovative thinking with the concept (e.g., Kaanan, who saw how the horse functioned and could relate it to every other aspect of the story).

Sometimes one student’s innovative use of the concepts helped all students understand at a deeper, more relational level (e.g., Than’s half-heart idea). When Lydia and Aimee shared student work with their whole class, it was for more than peer appreciation. The work by a student who could only draw a few relationships was important to share because it may have illustrated a different relationship than others had made. It also served as a prompt for discussions, from which new ideas sometimes emerged. A student’s work that involved many or complex relations was useful to share, because it showed other students how concepts could be extended, even if those students were not yet ready to do this independently.

5.3 Transferring Narrative Structures Serve Understanding

The literary framework of my study formed a significant part of the shared background knowledge that students brought with them to new texts. Schemata theories were developed to describe the internal or mental frameworks that help organize and make sense of new information (McVee, Dunsmore, & Gavelek, 2005; Rumelhart, 1984). It is thought that ‘pre-existing knowledge structures’ will serve to anchor text ideas and connect old ideas to new ones (Rumelhart, 1984). When schema theory was applied in educational research and practices, the term schema or schemata tended to be interchanged with variations of background knowledge, such as, prior knowledge, topic knowledge, existing knowledge and previous knowledge (McVee, Dunsmore, & Gavelek, 2005). Some studies have shown that students often comprehend a text better when their teacher provided ‘background knowledge’ before reading (Pearson, Hansen, & Gordon, 1979). Unfortunately, the term ‘background knowledge’ is vague and does not suggest what kinds of ‘knowledge’ might help a student understand a new text. Teachers need to keep in mind that the background knowledge that students bring to bear on a text needs to serve understanding. When students
make connections that are irrelevant to the text, they will have difficulty understanding what they are reading (Beck & McKeown, 2001; Gernsbacher & Faust, 1991; Paris & Paris, 2007).

One intent of my research was to avoid tangential and superficial associations to texts (e.g., during discussions) by promoting a framework that would serve the students’ immediate and future understandings. The transfer of structural (and conceptual) ideas successfully bridges the gap between old and new reading, creating, as Frye (1988) suggested, a sense of the whole of literature. Caine (2008) suggested that education should aim to increase the patterns that children can use to gain new understandings. In my study, the transfer of structural patterns helped the students move toward understanding the significance in what they were reading. The students brought to each new story, what they knew about how stories are structured. When the students made comments like “they are the same”, they were noticing what literary critics understand, that, “the more carefully we look at the vast range of stories thrown up by the human imagination through the ages, the more clearly we may discern that there are certain continually recurring general shapes to stories” (Booker, 2004, p.19). The students transferred these ‘shapes’ and saw them in the stories they experienced.

Students read texts not in isolation, but as a continuing experience from previous readings and understandings. As the framework moved with them from text to text, all previous texts became connected. It was as if the students were laying down a connecting thread as the year progressed. Aimee touched on this when she observed that her students did not “forget stories they read early in the year”. As our observations indicated, the students remember stories well by forming meaningful connections between them. And with each new text, they further developed their way to approach reading. This freed the teachers to choose the stories that best suited their students, make use of the literary resources already in their classrooms, and to embed newly discovered multimedia texts into their reading program. Otherwise we would have to claim that all students should watch Dragon Slayer (Kuczera, 2004) or read The Boy and the Giants (Moodie, 1993). “To understand something as a specific instance of a more general case—which is what understanding a more fundamental principle or structure means—is to have learned not only a specific thing but also a model for
understanding other things like it that one may encounter” (Bruner, 1960, p. 25). With this study, we helped the students develop a literary schema, with which to approach reading. It became part of the common or shared knowledge within the classroom. A background knowledge that the teachers could help develop equally with all their students, regardless of the students’ personal experiences. As they connected stories from week to week, individual stories were also remembered and formed a wealth of experiences from which to draw ideas. Our literary framework offered students a collective way to explore and understand how stories convey their meaning. The more relations and layers of understanding that are realized by the students, the more personal meaning each text may have to each individual student.

5.4 Developing Relational Thinking

My research suggests that a structural approach to literary (language) studies is an effective way to promote and develop higher order relational thinking skills. By their definitions, the structural concepts interacted and were therefore relational. By introducing students to the concepts, my research involved them in relational thinking and learning processes. In an attempt to articulate a framework by which we can understand the interactional complexities to learning, Alexander, Schallert & Reynolds (2009) asserted that, “learning should be constituted of at least four dimensions that are continuously interwoven and interactive, represented by the what, where, who and when of learning” (p. 180). These dimensions can also be referred to as the characters, actions, and time and place of learning, which, of course, are the same dimensions along which a story is structured and along which my literary framework approach was developed. Observations of the students’ responses showed that this approach aligned with and promoted relational thinking processes.

In a review of research examining what it means to be a competent 21st century reader, Alexander (2012) found the type of thinking required would be “those cognitive procedures purposefully applied to recognizing or deriving meaningful relations or patterns between and among pieces of information that would otherwise appear unrelated … such strategies serve as a counter to the tendency to treat information in a piecemeal or isolated manner (p. 272). In my study, the students were given a framework of literary structures that
served to engage them in relational thinking with each new concept, through each new dialogue, and with each text they read. Their concrete text experiences were framed by the structures of literature, which then informed their understandings of the structures, and how they further applied them.

5.4.1 Bringing scientific and creative thinking together. Our literary framework applied the same structures to read a text as were used to write the text, and so the same processes students used to critically analyze a story were those used to create the story. This relationship between scientific and creative processes is not a new idea, for Bronowski (1956) wrote that “the great poem and the deep theorem are new to every reader, and yet are his own experiences, because he himself re-creates them” (p. 259). Scientific and creative thinking have processes in common. This is important to note, for although some of the students’ activities of literary analyses were more like scientific endeavors, they involved the same thinking used to create the literary works.

Frye (1988) defined literature as “the total body of stories and symbols that provides hypotheses or models of human behaviour and experience” (p. 137). More recently, Oatley (2008) argued that fiction provides a “set of simulations of the what-ifs of social life” (p. 132). Both these definitions of literature and fiction used language common to both scientific and creative thinking. Science at the highest level is like poetry, for to be creative in any endeavor, is to imagine possibilities. “A man becomes creative, whether he is an artist, or a scientist, when he finds a new unity in the variety of nature. He does so by finding a likeness between things which were not thought alike before … the creative mind is a mind that looks for unexpected likenesses” (Bronowski, 1985, p. 247). My conceptual framework engaged students in learning and thinking by means of drawing relationships. By analyzing literature, the students were re-creating this creative process and discovering these likenesses for themselves.

5.4.2 Using relational thinking processes. My research showed that by means of the conceptual literary framework, the grade 1 and 2 students were able to make use of numerous higher order thinking processes, all of which involved relational thinking. Over ten months, the grade 1 and 2 students were able to evaluate, synthesize, draw inferences, reason with
cause and effect, categorize, think metaphorically, and reason with analogies, anomalies, and contrast (see Appendix L for some specific examples). New research is showing that relational reasoning strategies are necessary for the development of 21st century reading competencies (Alexander, 2012).

5.4.2.1 Inference. The structural literary framework was shown to be an effective way for students to uncover implied meanings in texts. Drawing inferences, a higher order cognitive skill, is important for reading comprehension (Duke, Pressley & Hilden, 2004; Kintsch & Kintsch, 2005; van den Broek et al., 2005; Van Kleeck, 2008). As the students, in my study, were reading, they activated their understanding of narrative structures, drawing inferences from this schema about relationships in the text to the literary structures in our framework. To discuss any aspect of a story’s structure, the students needed to infer. The students needed to consider the relationships in a story, then infer possible functional roles, and use these inferences to further consider the relationships. Only then did the students evaluate whether the element functioned in that role or related in other ways. An example of this was seen when the students were analyzing the film Dragon Slayer (Kuczera, 2004).

With only a brief narration at the beginning, this story was told almost exclusively through images. The students could not even use linguistic clues (e.g., descriptions, nouns and verbs) to understand the story. Their understandings and discussions were drawn from inferred relations based on imagery.

5.4.2.2 Cause and effect. Through the narrative concepts, the students engaged with and drew cause and effect relations. Causal knowledge “enables us to predict future events, to diagnose the causes of observed events, and to choose the right actions to achieve our goals” (Waldmann, 2010, p. 123). Students were practicing causal reasoning in their considerations of story structures and therefore story relations. They investigated heroic actions and their success or failure to achieve the desired goals. Students identified heroic traits of kindness, caring and helpfulness as they related to the satisfied desire of a story. Villainous traits were associated with attempts to block desired goals or the failure to cause a desired outcome. Each plotted event was related to a hero’s metaphorical distance from the desired object. Each action either caused or failed to cause the hero to move closer to what
was wanted. The grade 2 students, through the teacher’s use of what-if scenarios, were further involved in exploring the effects of change within a story. For example, the students first explored the immediate (event) and long term (plot) effects of the horse’s “nudging” actions on the dragon slayer. Then pondered all the possible effects of changing this one behaviour. Kaanan’s conclusion of “dragons will rule the world” showed just how affective and effective a simple change in behaviour might be. Further, in the stories read by the students, all desired goals were related to the six primary human needs. This connection between literature and community enabled the students’ investigations of story relationships to also become investigations into the relationships of human actions and behaviours, which are responsible for either meeting or withholding primary needs. My research lends support for the importance of fiction and literature as part of students’ language studies, and for the relevance of fiction in their lives.

5.4.3 Use of cognitive and reading comprehension strategies. Reviews of research have shown some strategies instruction to be beneficial to student comprehension, but they have also shown there is a lack of clarity about which context, grade level, delivery model, and text that strategies can be beneficially be applied (Dole, Nokes & Drits, 2009; McKeown, Beck & Blake, 2009b). In my study, Lydia and Aimee demonstrated some knowledge of instructional strategies, which they had developed over their years of teaching experience and professional development. I observed that both teachers used the conceptual literary framework to shape their use of a myriad of different comprehension strategies in their classrooms. They made use of different strategies as best suited the structural learning objectives of each lesson and class dialogue. Aimee and Lydia embedded numerous strategies into their instruction, including: predicting, monitoring accuracy of meanings developed while reading, questioning aspects of the text, categorization, forming mental images, reflecting before, during and after reading, drawing inferences, connecting ideas, figuring out main idea, summarizing, activating prior knowledge, drawing conclusions, question generating, and using graphic organizers (see Appendix M for specific strategies examples).

Further, the structural narrative framework of my study was shown to be more than simply a new or updated strategy for teachers to implement. In both classrooms, the discrete
understandings that the students developed using an individual strategy (e.g., what was comprehended through predicting) were brought together as part of a deep and layered comprehension of a whole text and the larger body of literature. The narrative structures provided the content for each strategy and, because the structures aligned with relational cognitive processes, the framework also shaped how teachers and students used the different strategies. For example, frequently, students were asked to make predictions before reading or listening to a new text. To make their predictions, students applied what they understood so far (schema) about the structural concepts (plot categories, functions, primary needs). They considered possible forms that the structures might take and predicted how these forms would relate. Thus their predictions were never disconnected from previous texts or from previous learning. As students came across new information, (e.g., the sudden appearance of the baby dragons in *Dragon Slayer* (Kuczera, 2004)), they reflected on their predictions and monitored the accuracy of the relations they drew. The framework provided the means by which the students could make meaningful predictions and reflections. These processes were repeated by teachers and students across the many different texts they experienced.

Students also used many graphic organizers to work with fiction, for example, spider diagrams, venn diagrams, t-charts, plot lines, problem/solution charts, and story maps, to name a few. They also expressed their ideas and learning through drama, poetry, prose, reading responses, illustrations, story writing, audio recordings, and sentence or paragraph writing.

### 5.5 Developing Metaphorical Thinking

Over the year, the grade 1 and 2 students used the narrative structures to draw relations for comparison, contrast and categorization, which helped them to move from descriptive to metaphorical thinking.

#### 5.5.1 Comparison. The students began their literary studies looking at explicit similarities and differences between characters within a story (e.g., by contrasting the goats and troll in *The Three Billy Goats Gruff*), between functions within a story (e.g., home and HOME were contrasted by the presence or absence of the primary needs), and between functions across stories (e.g., by comparing physical and behavioural similarities and
differences in villains). “Comparison can allow an individual to look past simple “surface” features, and to focus instead on potentially more meaningful structural commonalities” (Goldstone, Day & Son, 2010, p. 104). The grade 2 students and not long after, the grade 1 students were able to see similarities through inferences made about structural relations in stories. They did not only attend to the ‘content’ of a story, for example by focusing on their ‘real-world’ knowledge of an item in a story (e.g., a goat). They also attended to how items functioned in the story, including the relationships that they formed with all other story elements (e.g., hero). They were able to compare characters with very different forms (e.g., troll, giant, witch, girl, shark) and find them to be similar by their functional roles in the story (e.g., villains).

These functional roles also helped the students understand more about each item in the story. Comparison is an important thinking process for “when we compare entities, our understanding of the entities changes, and this may turn out to be a far more important consequence of comparison than simply deriving an assessment of similarity” (Goldstone, Day & Son, 2010, p. 117). For example, the students used the structural concepts (e.g., helper or villain) to compare story elements (e.g., giantess and sea princess; Nyasha and Manyara) to understand their function within a story. With their structural comparisons within and across stories, they were discovering the layers of meaning for each item.

5.5.2 Categorization. Often categories are thought of as static groupings into which objects are placed according to their inherent properties. However, Lakoff and Johnson (1980) carefully and meticulously presented an experiential view of categories, based on human thinking, which showed categories to be open-ended, flexible and dynamic. We use categories to frame how we approach new information and we categorize to draw relations between items. Because “members of a category have something in common, categories reveal patterns that remain invisible without them” (LeTourneau, 2001, p. 24). Through the course of this study, the students engaged in categorization to see the unity in things that seemed, at first, to be different. For example the narrative framework introduced the students to six plot categories. These categories were used to reveal hidden connections between stories.
By the end of the year, students in both grades were able to use all six categories to think about stories. The grade 1 students demonstrated that the story *Hercules* (Clements & Musker, 1997) could be categorized by all six plots, each one revealing different aspects of the story. The grade 2 students could also articulate these kind of relations in their writing. All students used the plot categories to approach new texts in relation to other texts (old experiences brought to bear on the new). A new plot category was used to think about different aspects of previously read texts, leading to new understandings (making the old experiences new).

The students also used the two contrasting categories of the ‘world we want’ and the ‘world we don’t want’ to draw relations between all story elements. Almost all images, events and actions were categorized by their relation to the ‘hero’ and what was wanted, thus falling into one of these two contrasting categories. By means of categorization, students were connecting all their reading experiences to one another.

Although we referred to the hero, villain and helper as narrative functions, they were categories of characters, which the students used to think about every story they read. To categorize a character as ‘hero’, ‘villain’, or ‘helper’ required the students to temporarily hide certain qualities of a character (e.g., physical appearance) and focus instead on its functional role and relation to other narrative elements (e.g., ‘want’ or other characters). For example, the students initially categorized certain characters as villains based on their perceptual similarities (e.g., scary, hairy, big), later categorized based on properties that were not directly observable (e.g., cruel, greedy), and then by their functional relationships to other characters (e.g., tries to block the hero from getting what is wanted).

5.5.3 Metaphorical thinking. To engage in metaphorical thinking is to understand one thing by means of another (Lakoff & Johnson, 1984). Metaphorical thinking involves categorizing items by their shared common attributes, and then by means of these commonalities, they are seen and understood as the same. To call an atomic bomb the monster or ‘villain’ in *Sadako* (Coerr, 2002), the students had to categorize it by the attributes it shared with other monsters, specifically functional and relational attributes. Students also needed to temporarily ‘hide’ the attributes of a bomb that were not shared with other villains.
(e.g., metal, inanimate). This process of categorization led to a refinement (development) in their understanding of the ‘villain’ category. The students deeper understanding of ‘villain’ through functional qualities allowed them later to identify internal aspects of a character, such as jealousy, as a villain. In this way, jealousy was shown to be much more than a simple description of a character. Instead it was revealed to have a vital function within the story, relatable to every other aspect of the story.

The grade 1 students drew relations between many disparate items and images, moving toward symbolic thinking. Some saw setting as being related to character (e.g., forests, caves and underwater signified villains), time related to setting and character (e.g., night signifies the hero was far from home), images related to human needs (e.g., arms outstretched signified freedom), and items related to the hero and desire (e.g., shield symbolic of the old life left behind). The grade 2 students moved to categorizing villains by their ‘villainous’ characteristics, which were exclusively internal traits. By uniting or contrasting story elements with the ‘hero’ and the ‘want’ of the story, the grade 2 students moved toward understanding the significance of those elements. For example, they discussed the desert as signifying unhappiness and a barren life, the dark cave signifying death and killing, the significance of food in contrasting relation to the ‘hero’ or ‘villain’, and the rainy weather signifying unhappiness.

Both grade 1 and 2 students were able to consider the significance of individual events within a story as a metaphorical relation to the hero and what was wanted. They categorized events as moves ‘up’ or ‘down’ in a story, not based on the hero’s physical movement in the setting, but the hero’s distance from satisfying what was wanted in the story. The grade 2 students were able to use the process of plotting events to consider contrasting perspectives within a story, considering each event from the viewpoint of a different character. So ‘up’ and ‘down’ movements were significant of the attitudes and behaviours of the characters, and how these related to reaching the desired goal.
5.6 Classroom Dialogue

What was Socrates’ practical method? It took the form of “dialectic” or conversation. He would get into conversation with someone and try to elicit from him his ideas on some subject … and as the argument proceeded from the particular to the universal, or from the less perfect to the more perfect, it may truly be said to be a process of induction (Copleston, 1993, p. 106).

Through dialogue the grade 1 and 2 students were able to engage in relational thinking and work together to construct meanings. Before this study began, the teachers and I expected that the narrative framework would be integrated, in some way, into their classroom discussions. We did not expect that group discussions would become such exciting places for student learning. During both large and small group discussions, the students focused on topics, listened to each other’s responses, built on what the teacher or their peers said, and carried themes or ideas from previous conversations into current discussions. Because the classroom instruction was centered on concepts and relational thinking, students could participate even though their individual understandings varied. Students at different comprehension levels had a common literary language by which to discuss ideas. The students with more developed understandings elaborated or expanded on comments shared by less knowledgeable peers, who, in turn, developed their understandings as they listened to shared ideas. Less complex relational responses were integrated into more complex discussions because more capable peers could draw additional relations and extend from a simple idea. Learning moved forward through these interactions (Vygotsky, 1978).

5.6.1 Building meaning through dialogue. In considering dialogic learning, O’Connor and Michaels (2007) imagined a classroom where “a teacher who completely commands the knowledge under discussion … has designed the interaction to obscure that fact, so that students will take a more ‘inquiry-based’ approach to the topic and work to generate their own evidence and reasoning” (p. 278). This kind of classroom was realized in our study. The aim of our intervention was not to tell students about fiction or narratives. At the heart of this approach was the desire to facilitate and develop deep understanding and relational thinking.
Lydia and Aimee introduced their students, step-by-step, to each concept in the narrative framework. They began with a definition that served as a beginning point to ‘activate’ learning. The students’ understandings developed and expanded through ongoing dialogues and practical exploration of these ideas in a variety of texts. This kind of inquiry was vital because “children [do] not always understand what they are told and so need to engage in clarifying dialogue to reach desired subjectivity, but, individually, they frequently have alternative perspectives on a topic that need to be brought into the arena of discussion for further exploration” (Wells, 2007, p. 263). In my observations, both Aimee and Lydia scaffolded the student dialogue with open-ended questions, prompts and information to expand, explain or relate ideas. They typically began conversations with open-ended questions, which ensured the conversations started within their students’ current level of understandings. They used the narrative structures to guide where they wanted the discourse to go, which was in the direction of understanding something more, or more deeply. Both teachers followed the twists and turns of the dialogues while keeping focused on their learning objectives. They asked relational questions to help the students extend their thinking while remaining connected to the topic and to each other’s ideas. Shared ideas were rarely left as fragmented information. When a student shared an idea or fact but could not see how it connected to the whole of the text, the teachers helped the students go back to how that item functioned within and in relation to the text.

Sometimes Lydia and Aimee asked ‘known-answer questions’ and included direct instruction as part of the larger dialogue. This seemed to align with what Wells (2007) called a dialogic stance. A teacher’s stance, over the course of many lessons, can be dialogic even with the inclusion of direct instruction. These moments of direct instruction were important to advance the students’ understanding by clarifying thoughts, reviewing previous learning, and introducing new ideas. Even a question that appeared to have a simple ‘known answer’, such as, “Who is the hero?”, involved the students in more thinking than would appear in a simple response, such as, “Thomas”. To identify a ‘hero’ required students to look at how different characters functioned through the whole of the story, how they related to the other functions within the story, and perhaps, how they were similar to heroes from other stories.
Following these short-response types of questions, Aimee and Lydia typically followed with prompts for more information, explanations, details, or extensions. Overall, in both classrooms, the students were engaged in “knowledge building that enhance[d] both collective and individual understanding” (Wells, 2007, p. 271).

5.6.1.1 Goal directed discussions. Beck and McKeown (2001) explored ways to promote student reading comprehension through class discussions, which is sometimes referred to in other research as dialogic teaching (Alexander, 2005; Abbey, 2005), taking a dialogic stance (Wells, 2007) or creating grand conversations (Wells, 2007; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2011). Alexander (2005) used the term dialogic teaching to refer to the process whereby teachers and students build on each others’ and their own knowledge and ideas to develop “coherent lines of thinking and inquiry” (Abbey, 2005, p. 5). According to Abbey (2005), a goal-directed dialogue is: “not simply talk or the sharing of ideas. It is a structured, extended process leading to new insights and deep knowledge and understanding and ultimately, better practice” (p.1).

In both classrooms of my study, I observed “coherent lines of thinking” throughout and across the students’ discussions, as well as inquiries into new understandings. This was made possible by revolving the discussions around relational thinking with the narrative structures. These structures remained constant over the school year, which allowed for significant changes to occur in the students’ ideas, and the deepening and developing of the students’ understandings. The structures emphasized relational thinking processes that were easily transferred to each new dialogue to form connections between ideas. Both Lydia and Aimee were excited to discover that, within about a month of the study, their students’ conversations showed great depth and insight.

Teachers can find it difficult to transform their classroom discussions from the social to include a cognitive function as well (Beck & McKeown, 2001; Alexander, 2010). If discussions are to move in the direction of meaning building, then teachers need to know and attend to the ideas that are important for building meaning. If teachers and students approach each text as a separate entity, then it would not be surprising if it was difficult to identify important ideas for meaning building in every text they read. The structures or codes of
literature are more than the means by which ideas are carried in a text. The structures or codes may be important ideas of a text. Therefore, the structural narrative approach may very well have provided a means for the teachers to create a true dialogue in their classrooms, with a goal of thinking and understanding a subject of study.

5.6.1.2 Engagement with the subject. The relational aspect of the narrative framework helped the teachers and students engage fully with textual ideas and remain focused on discussion topics. The purpose of the conversations went beyond sharing to a collaborative construction of both group and individual understandings. The group dialogues helped students understand ideas and individuals would contribute new ideas that helped propel the rest of the class forward or deeper in their thinking. The discussions felt like collaboration and a movement together in understanding. This was exemplified in Than’s ‘half-heart’ idea, which he figured out through his participation with the class, and then, in turn, moved the class as a whole to a new understanding. Just as more mature speakers provide support for children who are learning language (Vygotsky, 1986), in our study, students with a ‘deeper’ understanding of literature were able to support the other students who were learning.

The students remained focused on discussion topics when they left the whole group to work independently or in small groups. On their own, they did not copy what was said during the discussions. Rather the responses differed from student to student, were worded differently than the class model, or were applied to a different text or in a novel way than the class example.

5.6.1.3 Dialogue as a model. The narrative framework engaged students in constructing shared literary meanings. The narrative structures gave the teachers a means by which they could formulate inquiry questions, and gave the students a way to draw relations between ideas. The more the students were involved in discussions directed toward thinking and building meaning, the more they began to make these processes their own. For example, Aimee used ‘what-if’ scenarios to guide some of the class dialogues and to begin small group inquiries. In their small groups, the grade 2 students engaged in dialogues that began to resemble the larger group discussions. Students shared ideas, built on their peer’s responses,
and asked questions to help peers’ comprehension. Lydia also formed many of her questions like ‘what-if’ scenarios, and sometimes rephrased student responses in ‘what-if’ question forms. By May, the grade 1 students were independently asking ‘what-if’ questions to inquire into particular stories they were reading (or watching) and into the nature of the narrative structures. By thinking in ‘what-ifs’, students were showing that they had made relational thinking their own.

5.7 Research Limitations

My research shows what is possible when elementary teachers approach of their language instruction as a study in literary structures and relations. With a formative experiment, I was able to work reflectively with classroom teachers and implement my narrative framework within diverse and dynamic classrooms. However, as a consequence of choosing a formative experiment methodology, some limitations to this research need to be considered.

5.7.1 Analyzing empirical evidence. Including empirical data (e.g., standardized tests results, writing analyses, discourse analyses) from pre- and post-tests may have revealed specific or broad areas of improvement in student reading, comprehension, or critical thinking skills. Further research may consider using these kinds of data to lead to a better understanding of how teachers used the narrative framework and where improvements could be made in the intervention.

5.7.2 Increasing sample size. In subsequent research, changes could be made to increase the sample size, perhaps by involving a whole school or several schools, thereby increasing the number of students across a range of grades and within single grades. This would lend support to the generalizability of the instructional approach, and would reveal what kinds of changes could be made to support teachers’ implementation and students’ responses.

5.7.3 Including control groups. My study showed what is possible in two classrooms. However, future research might include control and experiment groups, which could be matched according to a set of parameters, for example, grade level, student academic competencies, reading comprehension test scores, or family backgrounds. This
would provide a comparison of how teachers approach and students respond to a range of fiction and narrative texts. Pre- and post-tests and teacher surveys might also be useful to help identify the gains in comprehension that students typically make over the course of a school year, and those which may be a result of implementing the narrative framework.

5.7.4 Extending the study longitudinally. Further research could extend my study to follow both students and teachers for longer periods of time. This would reveal how the teachers and students explore the literary structures and relational thinking across a wide variety of resources, perhaps with more nonfiction texts, games, online environments, advertising and other media.

5.7.4.1 Observing students over time. Students could be observed over a few years as they and their teachers continue to approach literature by its structures. In the year following my field, some of the grade 1 and 2 students were placed in the grade 2 and 3 classrooms with the other teachers who participated in my teacher-group meetings. These students were able to work with the structural narrative approach for a second year, and a longitudinal study would have been useful to note any further development and the ways they applied and extended it.

5.7.4.2 Observing teachers over time. A longitudinal study could observe teachers as they adapt what they know about literary structures into their next teaching years. For example, toward the end of the year of my field work, the students were beginning to ask their own ‘what-if” questions about literature, structures and patterns. In a second year, when the teachers would have been more familiar with the literary approach, they may have been able to help students develop activities by which they could pursue these inquiry questions. Also, in our last teacher meeting, the teachers mentioned that, in the next school year, they would like to implement sooner some of the activities developed near the end of the study. As an example, they wanted to displace stories throughout the year, rather than just at the end.

A longitudinal study could also follow teachers as they adapt the literary approach either with the same students a year later, or with different grades. In the two years following my study, Lydia was assigned to teach grade 1 the first year, and a 1/2 split grade the year after that. Lydia was able to keep some of her grade 1 students as they moved to grade 2. She
had the opportunity to explore the implications of the narrative framework with students who were familiar with it, were new to it, and were in two different grade levels. A longitudinal study would have enabled me to note how she adapted the approach, which texts she used, how she extended the structures into other language areas, and how she extended the relational thinking into other curriculum areas. Aimee was transferred to grade 5 the year following our study and then to kindergarten the year later. From my conversations with her, she adapted the narrative framework for both these grades. A longitudinal study would have allowed me to investigate how she used the literary framework to approach the language expectations of these different grades, and how the students’ relational thinking differed from kindergarten to grade 5.

5.8 Research Implications

5.8.1 Teacher learning communities. By using a formative experiment for my research, the teachers and I were able to create a professional learning community. Through our meetings, we inquired into a common subject of study even though the grades being taught spanned from one to three. By approaching language instruction by its structures, each teacher was involved in the same study, yet could develop her own understanding of the subject. The discussions that the teachers had in our group meetings were not different in kind from the dialogues of the grade 1 and 2 students. They were (perhaps) more complex and drawn from a wider experience of narrative.

In our meetings, the teachers discussed how this structural approach might look in her particular grade with her particular students. Together, the teachers decided which ideas would be introduced in grade 1, and how they would be extended in grades two and three. In this way all the teachers developed a common language to discuss the subject (literature and language) and were also aware of how this differentiated across the grades. There was a genuine connection between the five teachers and myself as we were free to develop our own learning. Over the year, many teachers in the school asked to join our meetings, perhaps because they could see that the teachers were not only developing their own learning about an important subject they teach, but learning practical ways to help their students to learn. The structural approach also gave the teachers room to make the ideas their own instead of
having to replicate lessons or activities. They were free to choose the texts they wanted and shape the activities to best serve their students.

Our meetings revealed to me that the teachers benefitted from the ongoing support and discussions as they implemented new ideas. Each teacher was able to learn from our meetings at their own levels or paces and were free to apply the ideas in their own ways. I spoke with them frequently and noted that they shared many ideas with each other as well. By focusing on literary structures, the teachers, like their students, were able to ask questions and deepen their learning slowly over the entire school year. In addition, I was not in a position of authority ‘over’ the five teachers. I was not observing their classrooms to evaluate or report on their performance. I was there to help them learn more about a subject that we all felt was important. It is necessary to ask how ongoing support can be provided as teachers implement new ideas and how we can ensure that they are free to try ideas in their classrooms without worrying about making ‘mistakes’. Approaching learning by means of a subject’s structures or principles provided a way for students to broaden and deepen their understanding over a longer period of time as they engaged with the concepts through experience. It may be that teacher professional development might benefit from a similar approach.

**5.8.2 Relating literature to math and science.** My research suggests that by approaching language studies through structural principles, students and teachers may have a way to relate these studies to those in math and science: not by surface connections (e.g., isolated content) but by relational thinking. Math and science are studies in relations, whereby students deepen their understanding of fundamental structures by connecting one idea to another. For example, to develop algebraic thinking, students explore patterns using a variety of materials. They are encouraged to look beyond the materials to ‘see’ the underlying structural patterns. In my study, students were applying these relational ‘math’ process to their study of literature. Teachers can unify the different areas of study by teaching relationally, so that students draw relations to deepen, expand, and extend their understanding of how various systems are structured.
5.8.3 Relevance of fiction. A study of fiction may be a very good way to develop a students’ relational thinking and understanding. As my research showed, students were engaged in and developing many higher order relational thinking skills. Critical thinking does not need to be added to language studies. Rather, approaching language through its structures aligns with critical thinking processes.

To be able to think relationally may help students in their interactions with others, with nature and with the environment. The students in my research were investigating how every aspect in a story connects to every other aspect. This way of thinking may be beneficial when students are interacting with and exploring the vital connections within their communities and the larger world around them. Through all of these connections, the students had a way to personally relate to all the texts they read. By looking beyond forms to the underlying relationships, they were able to ‘see’ themselves in the characters across the stories they read. Thus characters were seen as particular forms of universal human qualities, both desirable and undesirable. Students were engaged with possible relations that create worlds we desire and also came to understand some of the relations that have resulted in the worlds we do not desire. Through studies in fiction, the students were developing important thinking skills necessary for promoting and establishing positive human relationships. By means of the connection to human relations and universal concerns, the narrative framework provided a very useful way for the students to approach and relate stories from across many cultures.

5.9 Conclusions

The results from this study show that the structural literary framework provided an effective way for students to deepen their reading comprehension, uncover layers of meaning in texts, develop their understanding of the subject of language and literature, and engage in and develop higher order relational thinking processes. Teachers used the narrative structures to shape class instruction, dialogue and activities. By encouraging their students to draw ever deepening literary relations, they ensured that students at all levels of understanding could contribute, elaborate or extend from their peers’ ideas.
This literary approach was implemented under a working assumption that the narrative functions and plot structures (the literary framework) could be applied to all fictional or narrative texts. Through implementation, this research showed that students were able to use this framework as a way to approach all the multimedia and multicultural texts they read. The framework gave students a way to think about stories, to uncover the layers of meaning, and to deepen their comprehension. The structures engaged students in thinking relationally and thinking narratively, so that with this framework, students were seen to be not just thinking about stories, but thinking with stories.


Green, M. C. (2004). Transportation into narrative worlds: The role of prior knowledge and perceived realism. *Discourse Processes, 38*(2), 247-266. doi: 10.1207/s15326950dp3802_5


Appendix A

Background Survey of Teacher-Participants

At the beginning of the study, I gave the teachers the following questionnaire to gather some general information about their backgrounds and experiences.

Name:

What grade(s) are you teaching this year?

How many years have you been teaching?

Which grades have you taught? Please check all that apply.

☐ JK/SK
☐ Grade 1
☐ Grade 2
☐ Grade 3
☐ Grade 4
☐ Grade 5
☐ Grade 6
☐ Intermediate (please specify which grades)
☐ High School (please specify which grades)
☐ Special Education (please specify which classes)
☐ Other (please specify)

Do you have a background in literary studies?

☐ No
☐ Yes

If yes, please specify (e.g. university degree, courses, reading groups, personal research)

How would you classify your ethnic or cultural background? (This question is just to indicate the range of backgrounds of the teachers who are participating in this study.)
Appendix B

Stories Read During the Collaborative Teacher-Inquiry Meetings


Appendix C

Categories Shaping Classroom Observations

With the following categories in mind, I began to observe, take field notes, photograph or photocopy classroom anchor charts and instructional materials, photocopy some student work, and audio record some student and teacher literary discussions.

1. Examples of whole-class, small-group and independent activities related to reading

2. Examples of student-initiated conversations or questions about stories

3. Examples of student literary discussions in response to teacher direction

4. Examples of the relationships drawn by teachers and students between narrative elements, between stories, between stories across different media, between narrative elements across different subject areas, and between stories and the ‘real’ world

5. Examples of students responding to each other about story structures, formally in authors’ groups or peer conferences, and informally during small-group or independent reading and writing times

6. Description of how the teacher organizes his or her classroom program to support language development
Appendix D

End of Project Interview with Teachers (Semi-structured)

I asked the teachers the following questions during a focus group meeting at the end of the school year.

1. How do you feel about the efficacy of the questions that we developed for the stories you read to the students?

2. Are you satisfied with the progression of your literary instruction and student responses?

3. Do you feel that you can adapt these questions for any story that you read to children?

4. Do you think that knowing about literary structures helped the students understand more about what they are reading? Would you consider their interactions and responses critical?

5. What further changes would you make when using this approach next year?

6. Has your understanding of literary narrative structures changed over this school year? If so, how?

7. What would you say was most successful this year with the literary narrative structures?

8. What was most challenging with the literary narrative structures?
### Appendix E

Details and Examples from Data Analysis.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description of Analysis</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I transcribed all audio recordings and I added all of my personal notes and teacher</td>
<td>Dragon Slayer, January 10 Whole Class Discourse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>reflections in italics.</td>
<td>*The student was on to something here. The DS [dragon slayer] was training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>the dragons to use their fire for good - making horse shoes. At this point,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>they [students] seem unable to articulate this further.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I read through the transcriptions again, and drew lines to block the discussion into</td>
<td>Dragon Slayer, January 10 Whole Class Discourse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>topic units.</td>
<td>*In one conversation, the topics moved from:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• what life was like for the dragon slayer at the beginning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• classification of dragon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• the dragon’s actions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• what do people (villagers) need</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• what does the hero want</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• who helps the hero</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• redemption plot</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• what does the dragon slayer want</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• the horse nudges the dragon slayer toward the baby dragon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• the knight has become a blacksmith and trains the baby dragons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• the adolescent dragon burned the tree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• back to the dragon slayer and his job at the beginning of story</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• change in dragon slayer from beginning to end</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• what if baby dragons did not change</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Upon reading the raw data again, I made further notes in the margins to indicate the kinds of interactions and thinking that happened during each topic section.

- predicting using narrative framework
- categorizing the dragons → villains
- relating hero and villain
- prediction: student made an evaluation then provided evidence
- Redemption discourse: one student introducing idea → another student elaborating → back to student to summarize using peer information
- peer-to-peer response
- inferred meaning (touched on significance)
- teacher prompting to clarify that students were understanding

I checked student work samples to see if my notes about thinking also occurred there.

I went back through data and extracted the key ideas from my notes, with supporting student quotes, interactions and work samples, and moved them into another file. This reduced the data from hundreds of pages to about 50 for each class.
I summarized the significant changes and grouped them into categories.

Some significant changes in student responses that I grouped as Metaphorical Thinking:

- Grade 1: moved from external to internal change in relationship between hero and villain
- Grade 1: villain described by abstract trait
- Grade 1 & 2: students plotted events by up and down movement
- Grade 2 & end of Grade 1: related setting to villains
- Grade 2: Related images in setting to characters
- Grade 2: related villain as a character to villainous as character traits

Then I reread the summarized notes and colour coded them for the five categories. I also confirmed quotes and examples with the raw data. I further refined the name of the categories and began to write up the findings/results section.

The plotting up and down could be separated out as a distinct category from other metaphorical thinking.

Metaphorical and Symbolic Thinking

- Grade 1: moved from external to internal change in relationship between hero and villain
- Grade 1: villain described by abstract trait
- Grade 2 & end of Grade 1: related setting to villains
- Grade 2: Related images in setting to characters
- Grade 2: related villain as a character to villainous as character traits

The Significance of Story Events

- Grade 1 & 2: students plotted events by up and down movement
Appendix F

A Grade 2 Student’s Displaced Version of Qalupalik (Papatsie, 2010)

Sandupalik by Mahirah

Once upon a time in the far dry, hot and sandy desert lived a small happy family that lived in a beautiful cotten tent. In that family lived a getal (gentle) father, nice mother and two notty (naughty) brother. That small happy family also lived with some geniouse (generous) people. The geniourse people traveled far for the happy family to find water. They went through lots of sand dunes. The geniourse people once told the father that “there is a Sandupalik living on the sand line” so the father gave the two notty boys a warrning that “don’t go near the sand line it will be deragerase(dangerous)” But the two incorrigible boys were too incorrigible to listen to their father. Once the father let the two disobedient brothers go outside to play in the oasis (oasis). That was good for the two brother because they made a plan to go to the sandline. The sand line was waiting for the 2 brothers because somebody was living there and her name was SANDUPALIK looking as ugly as ever with wet sand for her hair lizerds all over her and her nails are as long as the ears of a fennec fox. The 2 brothers thought “My parents are just making up fiction stories I am going to that sand line” And so the 2 brothers just sneaked out of the oasis and went to the sand line. At the sand line someone just popped out of nowhere and grabbed one of the brothers. So the other brother just ran away back home. At home the other brother told his father. the father went outside took his courageous camle (camel) and set of (off). In his way he saw some footsteps of his son he knew it was his footsteps because he smelled them and it smelled like his son. He followed (followed) his footsteps. In the way of the footsteps he saw 3 piles of sand and 2 lizerds in each pile the father thought that “how many lizerds are altogether? Well first take my son then I will count up.” And went in his journey. In his journey he almost reached to the dangerous part. When he was almost there he saw a man selling his chicken but he did not get a tempted. Finally he reached to the sandline he saw a week (weak) hand sticking out he pulled the [hand] who should appear but his son looking as weak as ever. the father thought to hiself “I should give him some food back home” So in the way the father went to the 3 piles of sand and counted the lizerds in the pile and there were 6 lizerds altogether. When the father knew the answer the son asked his father to keep one of the lizerds. the father answer was “certainly” and they went home and lived happily ever after.
Appendix G

Events Plotted on an Interactive Board

A photograph of the interactive board following a lesson in which the grade 1 students plotted the events from the *Dragon Slayer* (Kuczera, 2004).
Appendix H

Template to Explore the Contrasting Aspects of Water

Mihirah used this template, created by her teacher, to create a poem about the contrasting aspects of water.

---

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Poem Template</th>
<th>Student Poem</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Stanza 1: Beneficial aspects of water</strong></td>
<td>Water</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am water. You know me</td>
<td>I am water. You know me</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For my ______ and _________</td>
<td>For my streams and creeks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For my ____________________</td>
<td>For my cool, beautiful, Clear rivers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>____________________________</td>
<td>Which relax all.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>which _____________ all.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| **Stanza 2: Harmful aspects of water**              |                                                   |
| I am water. You know me                            |                                                   |
| For my ______ and _________                        | I am water. You know me                           |
| ____________________________                       | for my turbulent, dirty, Rushing, rough floods    |
| which _____________ all.                           | Which destroy all.                                |

| **3rd Stanza: Water’s Foe**                        |                                                   |
| I am water. I have one foe                         | I am water. I have one foe                        |
| Who ____________________________                   | Who pollutes my power                             |
| Who ____________________________                   | Who poisons my purity                             |
| Who ____________________________                   | Who harms my happiness.                           |

By Mahirah

---
# Appendix I

## Sequence of Narrative Structures Introduced By Each Teacher

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade 1 (Ms. Lydia)</th>
<th>Grade 2 (Ms. Aimee)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>hero, villain &amp; lack</td>
<td>hero, villain &amp; lack</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>food &amp; freedom (primary needs)</td>
<td>world we want &amp; world we don’t want</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>world we want &amp; world we don’t want</td>
<td>home &amp; HOME</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>home &amp; HOME</td>
<td>helper &amp; token</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>shelter, clothing, love, health (primary needs)</td>
<td>move</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>move (they called it “adventure”)</td>
<td>food, freedom shelter, clothing, love, health</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>plotting story events</td>
<td>(primary needs)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>helper</td>
<td>plotting story events</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overcoming the Monster plot</td>
<td>Overcoming the Monster plot</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Redemption plot</td>
<td>Rags to Riches plot</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rags to Riches plot</td>
<td>Redemption plot</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Innocence to Experience plot</td>
<td>Innocence to Experience plot</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quest plot</td>
<td>Quest plot</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>token</td>
<td>Rebirth plot</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rebirth plot</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix J

Some Stories Read in the Grade 1 And 2 Classrooms

This list provides an example of the variety of stories analyzed by the grade 1 and 2 students throughout the year. The narrative framework was used to construct meaning with these texts. A reference list follows the table.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade 1</th>
<th>Grade 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Three Billy Goats Gruff</td>
<td>The Three Billy Goats Gruff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hansel and Gretel</td>
<td>Hansel and Gretel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jack and the Beanstalk</td>
<td>Jack and the Beanstalk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chrysanthemum</td>
<td>The Boy and the Giants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Boy and the Giants</td>
<td>Chrysanthemum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One</td>
<td>One</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Crane Girl</td>
<td>The Crane Girl</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Little Red Riding Hood</td>
<td>Mufaro’s Beautiful Daughters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Three Beavers Brown</td>
<td>Legends of the Guardians (movie)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Three Little Fish and the Big Bad Shark</td>
<td>The Princess and the Pea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Three Little Pigs</td>
<td>The Little Match Girl</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Gruffalo (movie)</td>
<td>The Maestro (novel)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peter and the Wolf</td>
<td>Lost and Found</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anna and the Seven Swans</td>
<td>The Lorax (movie)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heckedy Peg</td>
<td>The Hunter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Martin Luther King Jr</td>
<td>One</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nanny Goat and the Seven Kids</td>
<td>Stretch, Swallow and Stare</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sadako</td>
<td>Sadako and the Thousand Paper Cranes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Hungry Giant of the Tundra</td>
<td>Qalupalik (movie)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Lion and the Mouse</td>
<td>Dragon Slayer (movie)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oliver Button is a Sissy</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Recess Queen</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tangled (movie)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tarzan (movie)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qalupalik (movie)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dragon Slayer (movie)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tikkatoo’s Journey</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hercules (movie)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

References for the stories read by the grade 1 and 2 teachers.


Appendix K

Lydia’s Questions and Planning for Student Discussions

An example of the notes made by the grade 1 teacher before a language/reading lesson. This example shows the notes she made to guide her questioning as the class studied *Dragon Slayer* (Kuczera, 2004). Her questions were developed from the conceptual narrative framework that we discussed in our teacher study groups. Ms. Lydia wrote her own notes and stuck them to the summary notes that I gave all the teachers after our meetings.
Appendix L

Examples of Relational Thinking Processes Used by the Students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cognitive Process</th>
<th>Examples of how each of these processes were used</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Evaluating        | • Students identified fundamental themes in the texts they read, and could support their opinions with evidence from the texts.  
                   | • Students identified complex ideas in stories (e.g., rebirth and redemption) by using the relational plot structures. |
| Synthesizing      | • Students were able to thread information together into coherent understandings from September through to June. Texts were not introduced in isolation but as new forms and extensions of previous learned concepts.  
                   | • Students applied the narrative framework to think about and analyze stories, and to plan and produce their own variations  
                   | • Both classes explored and invented metaphorical creatures by extending their learning from Qalupalik (grades 1 and 2) and social studies units (grade 2).  
                   | • Throughout the year, the grade 2 students were able to synthesize and express their learning through role playing. |
| Analogical Reasoning | • Students perceived relational patterns across stories, which were comprised of very different forms. For example, students considered how the salmon related to Thomas (The Boy and the Giants (Moodie, 1993)) in the same way as the horse related to the knight (Dragon Slayer (Kuczera, 2004)).  
                           | • Students often used one relationship to understand another. |
| Anomaly           | • Through the plot categories, students were categorizing how very different stories followed similar patterns and they were also using the categories to see aspects of stories that do not “fit” the typical patterns.  
                           | • Students noticed how the lion (The Lion and the Mouse) did not fit the Overcoming the Monster plot pattern they typically encountered.  
                           | • Dissimilarities helped the students see multiple plot structures within single stories. When typical aspects of one plot were not fully seen in a story, they considered how another plot may have been used to help organize the story. |
| Antinomy          | • Students discussed and developed an understanding of the home concept by exploring the contrasting images and descriptions of home at the beginning and end of stories.  
                           | • The grade 2 students showed they could compose contrasting paragraphs (e.g., The Maestro (Palmer, 2003) analysis) describing what changes would occur to the home function.  
                           | • Students explored the helper function not only by figuring out the relations of helper to hero and want, but also by noting that helpers are not villains and do not block the way to desire. |
Appendix M

Some Reading and Comprehension Strategies Embedded into the Structural Approach

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategy</th>
<th>Example of how each strategy was used with the structural narrative approach</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Predicting</td>
<td>• When approaching a new story, both grade 1 and grade 2 students made predictions about the possible form that each function would take; students discussed possible relations in a new story based on plot predictions</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Monitoring accuracy of meanings developed while reading | • As teachers read stories out loud to students, they looked back to the predictions they had made as to the form functional structures might have taken  
• Inaccuracies were teased out during discussions, small group work and mini-lessons with the teachers by thinking through relations within the story |
| Questioning aspects of the text | • During dialogues, the students questioned which narrative functions may or may not be present in a particular text, how aspects of the text related, how functional roles overlapped, the meaning of structural concepts as more complex relations were uncovered, and how details related to functions or plot structures |
| Categorization                  | • Students categorized all the stories they read by plot structures; students re-categorize a story into a different plot by looking at different aspects within that story, to understand more about that and other stories  
• For every story, students categorized characters by their functional role |
| Forming mental images           | • The grade 2 students formed mental images of how characters might behave and what characters might say in order to dramatize analyzed problems and solutions (cause and effect relations) |
| Reflecting before, during and after reading | • Students were immersed in the study of literature through reflective dialogue and activities that connected stories one to another over the entire school year  
• All reflection was done through activities to promote relational thinking |
| Drawing inferences              | • Students inferred functional roles of story characters in order to categorize them and draw relations between them  
• To discuss any structural concept, students needed to infer relations as no story explicitly made reference to its organizing structure |
| Connecting ideas                | • By approaching reading comprehension by means of structures, students were engaged in connecting ideas during every discussion or lesson  
• At the end of the school year, the grade 2 students composed paragraphs to demonstrate how they related different stories by plot categories |
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| Figuring out main idea          | • All aspects of the narrative framework provide students with a way to delve deeply into the main ideas of a story  
• At the end of the study, the grade 1 teacher scribed a letter to me as directed by her students during one of the last class discussions - the class wrote “the most important idea about stories is the hero and what is wanted” |
| Summarizing                     | • Plot categories provide a means for students to ‘see’ the whole of a story at once, and how the functions will relate from beginning to end, thus an ideal tool for summarizing |
| Activating prior knowledge      | • Students used their developing understandings about the structure of narratives to approach new texts (see discussion section on transferring and schema)  
• Students brought structural concepts to bear on new texts  
• Students were compiling a repertoire of stories that they could refer to to help make sense of new texts |
| Drawing conclusions            | • Grade 1 students used functional relations to write about the importance of the cranes in *The Crane Girl* (Charles, 1999)  
• The grade 2 students wrote responses about importance or significance more frequently in their small groups and independently |
| Question generating            | • Throughout each dialogue, the teachers modeled how questions could be generated for particular stories using universal structures  
• At the end of the year, the grade 1 students were posing ‘what-if’ questions about Qalupalik based on possible changes in details and functional roles  
• Students questioned how plot structures might change |
| Graphic organizers             | • The grade 2 teacher organized reading response activities that involved the use of Venn diagram, plot lines, and t-charts  
• These organizers were used later by students when asked to independently choose a way to express ideas about a text they were reading |