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The Long, Long Way: Young Children Explore the Fabula and Syuzhet of Shortcut

In the picture book Shortcut (1995), the mediated telling of the fabula (the story) by David Macaulay results in a nonlinear and nonsequential syuzhet (the plot). Several metafictive devices used in the construction of the syuzhet of Shortcut draw attention to its status as text and fiction. Although researchers and theorists have written about metafiction, there is a lack of research that has explored students' literary understandings of and responses to books with metafictive characteristics. As well as defining metafiction and identifying various metafictive devices described in the literature, this article discusses young children's responses to and understandings of some of the metafictive devices in Shortcut.

KEY WORDS: metafiction; picture books; children's responses; postmodernism.

Russian Formalists, who were interested in the structure of literary texts, developed a theory of narrative, distinguishing between story and plot. According to Formalists, fabula (the story) refers to the way in which an event unfolds, the "brute chronology" (Holquist, 1990, p. 113) of the narrative, and syuzhet refers to the plot, "the order and manner in which events are actually presented in the narrative" (Cuddon, 1999, p. 328). The mediated telling of events by an author is a construction, and the chronology of events might be varied in some way for a particular effect (Holquist, 1990, p. 113). Distinctions between fabula and syuzhet are evident in a growing number of picture books for children. For example, in David Macaulay's Shortcut (1995), the whole point of the book is how the telling differs from the chronology of actual events. The syuzhet of Shortcut is nonlinear and nonsequential, and the narrative is multistranded, as multiple stories and perspectives are presented in text and illustrations. The multi-

M. Holquist, Dialogism: Bakhtin and His World
J. A. Cuddon, The Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory
D. Macaulay, Shortcut
plicity of Shortcut creates indeterminacy and readers must fill in the many gaps of this writerly text (Barthes, 1970). The syuzhet of Shortcut draws attention to its status as text and fiction. Indeed, Macaulay cleverly employed several metafictive devices in his construction of plot (the syuzhet).

Although researchers and theorists have written about metafiction, there is a lack of research that has actually explored students' literary understandings of and responses to books with metafictive characteristics (McClay, 2000; Pantaleo, 2003). Further, although some research has focused on primary grade students' responses to literature (Barone, 1990; Commeyras & Sumner, 1996; Hickman, 1981; Labbo, 1996; Many & Wiseman, 1992; Sipe & Bauer, 2001), few studies have examined the responses of Grade 1 children (Kiefer, 1993; McGee, 1992; Pantaleo, 2002, in press; Sipe, 2000). Therefore, this article addresses two gaps in the literature as it discusses Grade 1 students' responses to and understandings of some of the metafictive devices in the picture book Shortcut.

**Metafiction**

Examples of metafiction have existed since the beginning of literary publishing (and earlier in some devices of oral storytelling). Lewis writes that metafiction is "an a-historical notion" that “has tended to appear from time to time throughout history” (2001, p. 94). Waugh defines metafiction as “fictional writing which self-consciously and systematically draws attention to its status as an artefact in order to pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality” (1984, p. 2). By drawing readers’ attention to how texts work and to how meaning is created, metafiction reflects “upon the processes through which narrative functions are constructed, read and made sense of” and poses “questions about the relationships between the ways we interpret and represent both fiction and reality” (McCallum, 1996, p. 397). Goldstone (1998), Lewis (1990, 2001), Lodge (1992), Nikolajeva and Scott (2001), Stephens and Watson (1994), and Trites (1994) have also written about metafiction. One element common to their discussions about metafiction is its self-referentiality and self-consciousness; metafictive texts draw attention to their status as fiction and text through the use of a number of devices or techniques.

In her book, _Metafiction: The Theory and Practice of Self-conscious Fiction_ (1984), Waugh discusses the metafictional novel and describes the various techniques authors use to create metafictonal texts. In her discussion of metafiction, McCallum writes that it is necessary to consider “the specific strategies through which metafictions play with literary and cultural codes and conventions” (1996, p. 400). In picture
books, metafictive devices can be employed with both the verbal and the visual texts. Illustrations can reveal, sometimes independently of and sometimes in conjunction with the words, how the fictional reality of the story is constructed (and therefore comment about how our world is constructed).

Many researchers and theorists have identified narrative and discursive techniques commonly found in metafictive forms of adult, children’s and young-adult literature. But is a text considered metafiction if it includes only one such device? Generally, metafictive techniques are used in combination and the synergy of multiple devices serves to amplify a text’s fictional status and its self-conscious nature. A review of the literature reveals the identification of several metafictive devices; however, the list that follows is neither exhaustive nor definitive. Further, several of the specific devices identified below could be incorporated by some of the more general metafictive techniques described in the literature such as “boundary-breaking” (Lewis, 1990), “unstable text” (Fish, 1994), and “nontraditional ways of using plot, character, and setting” (Anstey, 2002, p. 447). The devices are not mutually exclusive, and there is overlap among many of the techniques. The common element of the various devices listed below is their power to distance readers from text, often frustrating traditional reading expectations and practices, and positioning “readers in more active interpretive roles” (McCallum, 1996, p. 398).

1. “overly obtrusive narrators who directly address readers and comment on their own narrations” (McCallum, 1996, p. 397; see also Anstey, 2002; Lodge, 1992; Nikolajeva & Scott, 2001; Stephens & Watson, 1994; Waugh, 1984)
2. polyphonic narratives or multiple narrators or character focalisers (McCallum, 1996; Stephens & Watson, 1994)
3. manifold or multiple narratives (Goldstone, 1998; McCallum, 1996; Stephens & Watson, 1994; Trites, 1994; Waugh, 1984) or multistranded narratives (i.e., “two or more interconnected narrative strands differentiated by shifts in temporal and spatial relationships, and/or shifts in narrative point of view”; McCallum, 1996, p. 406)
4. narrative framing devices (e.g., stories within stories, “characters reading about their own fictional lives . . . self-consuming worlds or mutually contradictory situations . . . a nesting of narrators”; Waugh, 1984, p. 30)
5. disruptions of traditional time and space relationships in the narrative(s) (Goldstone, 1998; Lodge, 1992; McCallum, 1996; Stephens & Watson, 1994; Waugh, 1984)
6. nonlinear and nonsequential plots including narrative discontinuities (Goldstone, 1998; McCallum, 1996; Stephens & Watson, 1994; Waugh, 1984)
7. intertextuality (Anstey, 2002; Nikolajeva & Scott, 2001)
8. parodic appropriations of other texts, genres and discourses (McCallum, 1996; Stephens & Watson, 1994; Waugh, 1984)
9. typographic experimentation (McCallum, 1996; Stephens & Watson, 1994; Waugh, 1984)
10. “mixing of genres, discourse styles, modes of narration and speech representation” (McCallum, 1996, p. 397), including “people prose” (Goldstone, 1998; Stephens & Watson, 1994; Waugh, 1984)
11. “situations where characters and narrators change places, or shift from one plane of being to another” (Stephens & Watson, 1994, p. 44)
13. new and unusual design and layouts (Anstey, 2002)
14. excess (i.e., “testing limits—linguistic, literary, social, conceptual, ethical, narrative” Lewis, 1990, p. 144)
15. illustrative framing, including mise-en-abyme (i.e., “a text—visual or verbal—embedded within another text as its miniature replica”; Nikolajeva & Scott, 2001, p. 226)
16. description of the creative process, making readers “conscious of the literary and artistic devices used in the story’s creation” (Goldstone, 1998, p. 50; also, McCallum, 1996; Waugh, 1984)
17. “indeterminacy in written or illustrative text, plot, character or setting” (Anstey, 2002, p. 447; see also Goldstone, 1998; Lewis, 1990; McCallum, 1996)
18. “availability of multiple readings and meanings for a variety of audiences” (Anstey, 2002, p. 447; see also McCallum, 1996; Nikolajeva & Scott, 2001; Stephens & Watson, 1994)

I believe that David Macaulay incorporates various metafictive devices in Shortcut, including: manifold or multiple or multistranded narratives, the narrative framing device of stories within stories, disruptions of traditional time and space relationships in the narrative(s), nonlinear and nonsequential plots including narrative discontinuities, and indeterminacy in written text and plot.

Shortcut was one of nine picture books I used in a study that explored the nature of Grade 1 students’ literary understanding by examining their verbal responses during interactive storybook read-alouds, and their subsequent written, visual arts, and dramatic responses. Rather than specifically addressing the nature of the children’s literary understandings, this article describes the students’ interpretations of and responses to the metafictive techniques identified above in Shortcut.
The Context

As reported elsewhere (Pantaleo, 2003), during the 10-week study in the spring of 2001, the Grade 1 children listened to me read nine picture books: Willy the Dreamer (Browne, 1997), Snowflake Bentley (Martin, 1998), Safari (Bateman, 1998), Something from Nothing (Gilman, 1992), Shortcut (Macaulay, 1995), The Empty Pot (Demi, 1990), Voices in the Park (Browne, 1998), The Three Pigs (Wiesner, 2001), and Tuesday (Wiesner, 1991). With input from the teacher, Ms. P., the 23 participants, 18 boys and 5 girls, were organized into six heterogeneous groups of three or four students. Group membership changed throughout the study for various reasons. The school’s population draws students from predominantly lower socioeconomic class families, and several families are recent immigrants to Canada. English was not the language spoken at home for 8 of the 23 participants. Overall, in Ms. P.’s opinion, the children’s literacy skills were below average at the beginning of the year. Although all students made progress throughout the school year, seven were below provincial standards for Grade 1 in both reading and writing at the end of the year.

During the study, the children participated in both small-group and whole-class interactive read-aloud sessions. The students were encouraged to talk to one another or to me at any point during the small-group read-aloud sessions. I also asked questions during the sessions that encouraged student consideration and discussion of unexplored textual and illustrative aspects. Subsequent to reading the story to each small group, I reread the book to the entire class; again, the students were encouraged to participate in the read-aloud session. All read-aloud sessions were audio-recorded. Research has explored children’s comprehension of stories when read aloud (Morrow, 1987, 1988; Morrow & Smith, 1990), and findings indicate that “reading to children in small groups offer[s] as much interaction as one-to-one readings and appear[s] to lead to greater gains in comprehension than whole-class or even one-to one readings” (Morrow & Gambrell, 2000, p. 571).

For the first five books, the students completed an independent writing activity after the small group read-aloud sessions. However, for the last four books, the children wrote responses after the whole class read-aloud sessions. Ms P. and I found that it was more effective to remind all of the children after the whole class read-aloud sessions to think about what they were feeling, thinking, wondering about, questioning, or imagining as they listened to and talked about the story before they began writing. Thus, for the last four books read aloud in the study, the children wrote responses after listening to the
stories twice. Finally, the students completed an activity designed to extend their reading experiences for each of the nine books used in the research. Collaboratively, Ms. P. and I generated drama, visual arts, and/or writing activities.

As with each book used in the study, there were seven read-aloud sessions for *Shortcut*, six small-group sessions and one whole class, resulting in the production of approximately 200 minutes of audi-tape. I also consulted my research journal and the observational field notes taken by the teacher during the whole class read-aloud session when analyzing the transcripts. I read the transcripts of *Shortcut* several times, searching for examples that both reflected and illustrated the children’s responses to and interpretations of the metafictive devices described previously.

*Shortcut*

The frontispiece in *Shortcut* (1995) provides readers with an introduction to the book’s cast of characters: June, Albert, Patty, Pearl, Professor Tweet, Sybil, Clarinda, Clarinda’s cockatoo, and Bob. Macaulay’s picture book is organized into nine chapters and an epilogue. In Chapter 1, readers are introduced to Albert and his horse, June. Each week on market day, they travel to town to sell their ripest melons. Albert and June regularly stop at a bridge along the way; Albert tosses a coin in the water and makes a wish. On this particular day, he decides to take a shortcut up a steep hill. Albert removes his coat and hangs it on a signpost so that he can more easily help June haul the wagon up the incline. The signpost conveys information to travelers about the directions to take for the “shortcut” and for the “long long way.” When they reach the top, Albert descends the hill, retrieves his coat from the signpost, and he and June continue their journey, stopping only at the Railway Café for something to eat. At the market, their melons are popular and the wagon is soon empty. Albert and June arrive home before dark.

Chapter 2 introduces readers to Patty and her pig, Pearl. How is this chapter connected to the first chapter? Why does Pearl disappear without a trace? The remainder of the book follows the exploits of Patty, Pearl, Professor Tweet, Bob, Sybil, and Clarinda and her cockatoo. *Shortcut* has a nonlinear and nonsequential plot, and each subsequent chapter is somehow linked to events in Chapter 1. The text is multilayered, and readers must be attentive and “see not merely look” (Macaulay, 1991, p. 419) in order to weave a story (or two) within the framework provided by the author. Indeed, there is no “shortcut” to constructing a cohesive fabula (i.e., the story) from the individual narratives in the picture book.
Student Responses to Metafictive Devices

The following metafictive devices are present in *Shortcut*: manifold or multiple or multistranded narratives, the narrative framing device of stories within stories, disruptions of traditional time and space relationships in the narrative(s), nonlinear and nonsequential plots including narrative discontinuities, and indeterminacy in written text and plot. These five metafictive devices are discussed collectively due to the interdependent and synergistic relationship among these particular techniques. The transcript excerpts, taken from only the small group discussions (and thus the children’s first experience with the book), are representative of the students’ talk about *Shortcut*. All student names are pseudonyms and S represents my articulations.

As described earlier, the characters in *Shortcut* go about their lives unaware of the actions of the other characters in the book. Yet, each action has a consequence, producing a bizarre chain of events and creating chaos for many characters. In *Shortcut*, some links among the multiple narratives and characters are revealed through words and others are disclosed solely through illustrations. Visual clues provide details that enable readers to make associations and connections between the various stories and characters, to fill in the gaps, and to unravel the interdependent, yet synergistic subplots (and hence the overall plot). McCallum writes that multistranded narratives “are constructed of two or more interconnected narrative strands differentiated by shifts in temporal and spatial relationships, and/or shifts in narrative point of view” (1996, p. 406). According to Trites (1994), Macaulay’s book includes both textual and visual manifold narratives. Illustrative details foreshadow upcoming events and, in the end, ensure that all loose ends are tied up.

The multiplicity in *Shortcut* creates a nonlinear and nonsequential text. Further, the many diversions (i.e., disruptions, interruptions, multiple narratives) in the picture book disrupt time and space relationships in the story, as well as divert reader attention. Macaulay’s book includes the coexistence of several narratives that are interconnected and looping, a narrative structure that differs from traditional time and space relationships in picture books. The discursive organizational structure of chapters in a picture book may cause further disruptions for some readers.

The use of chapters as an organizational format also foregrounds the narrative structuring in *Shortcut*. As stated previously, readers meet Albert and June in the first chapter. The story of their day’s events going to market is conveyed sequentially and linearly. However, Chap-
Chapter 2 presents readers with a new narrative about Patty and Pearl. Narratives about different characters—Professor Tweet, the Darlington Cannonball, Sybil, and Bob—are introduced in subsequent chapters. Readers must suture these narrative disruptions in order to unravel the visual and verbal manifolds.

The intratextual connections are plentiful in the book as Macaulay refers visually and verbally to previous events, characters, or items in his text that highlight the constructedness of the text. The students made connections between the actions of Albert and June and the fates of subsequent characters, understanding both the simultaneity of events as well as the ensuing chaos in some narratives. When June was tied to the railway switch outside the Café, she stretched for some tasty clover and moved the switch, consequently changing the course of the Darlington Cannonball.

S: How could a train be coming down the track? I thought it was an abandoned railway line?

Ethan: Well remember how the horse pulled on it [the railway switch] when it walked away from the switch? Well instead of going on the track that it [the train] wanted to go on, it got onto the abandoned one when the horse made it switch.

Mohad: And now the train is going to hit the pig!

June’s actions affected not only Pearl. The train’s new trajectory resulted in the train colliding with a camper on a truck.

S: What happened here?

Kathy: The sign says “Closed.” [points to sign]

Robert: The train went through there and then it cut the house!

S: Exactly, the train went right through these people’s trailer. Would the people be expecting a train to be on these tracks?

All: No.

S: Why not?

Fernandez: Because trains don’t go through there anymore, but it did because it went on the wrong track because of the horse.

As Albert and June continued on their journey to town to sell their melons, they unknowingly untied Professor Tweet’s hot air balloon as it impeded their way.
S: Why is the balloon breaking free?

Gurjit: I know 'cause they [Albert and June] untied it.

Ryan: Because accidentally they untied it and nobody knowed they were up there. That’s why they untied it and then the balloon went away and then the glasses and his hat went down.

Brianna: And that paper [points to paper in illustration].

As Professor Tweet’s balloon sails toward the church spire in Fauxville, the children made further connections.

S: Look at what’s coming.

Peter: And I knew it that he was going to pop that, his balloon on that sharp thing [church’s spire].

Ali: And there’s the bird sleeping.

S: Whose bird is that?

Chris: The lady’s from the beginning.

S: Clarinda. And remember she was crying?

Omar: ‘Cause her bird ran away.

Peter: And the professor found it.

S: Chapter 4. Someone has opened the switch, sending the Darlington Cannonball onto the abandoned line.

Chris: The horse did it!

The above transcripts reveal how the Grade 1 children actively worked to create unity among the nonlinear and nonsequential plots, the multistranded narratives, and the stories within stories, demonstrating “that it isn’t necessary to think in a straight line to make sense” (Macaulay, 1991, p. 419). The children understood that even though Macaulay’s mediated telling of the syuzhet included narrative discontinuities and disruptions in time and space, the multiple stories and characters interacted and were ultimately connected. The excerpts illustrate the children’s participatory behaviours as they co-created the text. Indeed, the metafictive devices in Shortcut position the reader in a coauthoring role.

As evident in one of the above excerpts, the children also made intratextual links to information provided visually on the frontispiece. They noted the bird lying in the eaves trough as Professor Tweet’s hot air balloon basket skimmed the rooftops.
Ivan: There’s that bird!
S: Do you remember that bird from before?
Sam: That escaped from that cage in the front of the book.
S: Does that look familiar? [points to feathers sticking up on head]
Shamah: His hair is sticking up.
Sam: It’s the same bird.

As the syuzhet continues, readers experience several narrative shifts to other characters and must make associations between the new and previous characters and events. As noted earlier, many of the narratives are linked only visually. When the children saw the illustration of Bob floating in his boat at the beginning of Chapter 7, they recognized the bridge from the first chapter.

Tom: It’s the same bridge that they [Albert and June] crossed over.
S: How do you know that?
Frank: Because you can see those signs [points to the crest on the bridge].
José: Yeah, those. There’s the hill, there’s the bell, there’s the money, there’s . . . I can’t remember what that one is.

As Bob’s exploits unfolded in Chapter 7, the students made further connections to other narratives in the book. They understood that one character’s story was indeed part of another character’s narrative. The children knew the sandbags were from Professor Tweet’s hot air balloon and the money at the bottom of the river was from Albert.

S: Chapter 7. Bob sleeps all day. He loves the peace and quiet of the river. In his favorite dream . . .
Changwei: These are the Professor’s [points to the sandbags]—they are going to go bonk!
Robert: It’s going to land on his head.
Peter: I think it’s going to land on his face.
S: Good connecting! In his favorite dream, be is admiral of the fleet. And look, as Changwei said, here comes the Professor’s things. [I turn the page—the next double-page spread shows Bob falling in the water and sinking to the bottom of the river.]
All: SPLASH!
Changwei: I knew it!
Kathy: He’s [Bob] going to get the coins.
Robert: Remember that man that had the fruit, and that’s his coins that he throws every day.

S: Very good.

Fernandez: Hey, remember this guy [Bob]? He was upside down at the front cover.

The transcripts reveal that the students competently dealt with the disruptions among the many narratives. They understood the simultaneity of events in individual stories. The children knew that right after Albert hung his coat on the signpost (he was still ascending the hill), Sybil drove by and read the directions for the shortcut. Unfortunately, Albert’s coat covered the arrow for the shortcut, and hence Sybil took the “long long way.” Although the children did not read about Sybil until Chapter 5, they understood that these two stories were indeed part of the larger narrative.

Nathan: She went the long, long way.
S: Why did Sybil go the long, long way?
Jeremy: Because that man put his coat on the sign.
S: And what did he cover up?
Mohad: Shortcut that way.
Nathan: She [Sybil] went the long way and got mixed up.

Some of Macaulay’s illustrations divert the reading and viewing experience, as they disrupt usual assumptions about what is real. For example, the rabbits play a very active role in several of the narratives (although they are never mentioned in the written text) and act as coauthors in some respects. At the end of Chapter 2, the rabbits “tell” Patty about what happened to Pearl—one rabbit covers its eyes with one foot and holds Pearl’s bell in its other front foot, another uses its front feet to pantomime the collision of Pearl and the train, and a third points to Pearl’s bell. The children understood the rabbits’ contributions to the telling of this particular narrative. Indeed, the rabbits were filling in a gap as readers did not see the Darlington Cannonball actually collide with Pearl in this chapter.

Ali: Look, the rabbit is covering his eyes.
S: Why do you think the rabbit is doing that?
Chris: Because it was bad when the train hit Pearl.
Omar: The pig got smooshed. Pee-yew!
The children also recognized that some illustrative disruptions were “playful” diversions and were not fundamental to constructing the narrative(s). For example, June the horse is wearing curlers in her mane and watching television with Albert at the end of Chapter 1.

S: *Their melons are very popular, and the wagon is soon empty.* Once again, Albert and June get their wish. They are home before dark. [Children are laughing.] What are you laughing at?

Ivan: The horse has rolls.
S: That’s right.
Shamah: But it’s a boy though.
S: And Albert takes off his shoes and puts on his slippers. What about the horse?
Ethan: The horse looks like a girl.
Mohad: He takes off his horseshoes. I think this is a girl [the horse] because there could be girl horses.
Shamah: And look at the horse. It’s sitting and watching T.V. with him [Albert].
S: That’s right.
Ivan: The horse took off his little hoops.
S: Right, his horseshoes like Mohad said. So Albert took off his shoes and June took off her shoes, too.
Mohad: He’s a copier! He’s a copier!
Ethan: The horse is a copycatter!

Another playful illustrative diversion was the “unfrog-like” behaviour of the frogs at the beginning of Chapter 6 when Patty begins her search for Pearl.

S: *Chapter 6. Patty must find her best friend. First she tries all the familiar places.*

Gurjit: Hey, that frog is swimming like a human [points to the illustration].
S: He is. Good observation!
Melissa: And that one’s wearing a bathing cap like a human.
Ryan: Yeah, and that one’s wearing a bathing cap, too!
Gurjit: That’s weird!

The Collaborative Reader

Although readers are always involved in the construction of meaning when reading (Rosenblatt, 1978), the metafictive devices in *Shortcut*
give agency to readers and require them to become even more involved in the creation of meaning. Iser (1978) writes of gaps or blanks in texts and of the reader’s active role of “filling-in” these indeterminacies. Indeterminacies may be found “in written or illustrative text, plot, character or setting” (Anstey, 2002, p. 447) and depend on the interpretation of the reader. Indeed, indeterminacies may be interpreted in a number of different ways, hence the multiple possibilities of a text. The multistranded narratives, the multiple characters, the numerous disruptions, the simultaneity of events in various stories, and the nonlinear and nonsequential plot combine to create indeterminacies in *Shortcut*. Readers must go the “long, long way” to fill in the gaps in Macaulay’s picture book and to construct a coherent, consistent, and unified “whole.”

Much of each narrative in *Shortcut* is told visually; overall, the quantity of written text in the book is limited. The Grade 1 students had to fill in both illustrative and textual gaps in each individual narrative. As evident in some of the transcripts presented previously, and in the two excerpts below, the children also had to engage in gap-filling between the various stories. The first excerpt is about Bob when the sandbags from Professor’s Tweet air balloon are plummeting to earth, and the second excerpt is from a group’s discussion about Sybil taking the “long, long way.”

S: Now what do you think is going to happen to Bob?
Melissa: He’s going to die.
Ryan: He’s going to have sand in his boat.
Brianna: And then he is going to sink.
S: Suddenly he is thrown from his boat. Fortunately, he sinks to the bottom,
Brianna: Then he finds the money.
S: *which is bow be makes bis dream come true.* Now where did the money come from?
Melissa: The man who likes to drop the money . . .
S: Keep going, Melissa.
Melissa: The man who dropped all the pennies who wanted a wish.

Phillip: And she’s taking the long, long way and she doesn’t know that’s the short, short way (points to the way that it is the short way).
S: Why not?
Frank: Because of the coat.
Phillip: Because that man [Albert] covered up the sign way back here.

In assuming a collaborative role when reading, the students manifested involvement, alertness, freedom of choice, responsibility, flexible thinking, a questioning stance, and “an openness to alternative formulations of experience” (McCallum, 1996, p. 399). Story creation is a self-empowering activity. When the reader, or character, is involved in the construction of text as self-conscious collaborator, the reader’s (character’s) worldview and perspective are brought into play. The Grade 1 students participated in constructing storylines by altering and manipulating the text, inventing possibilities and filling in gaps. For example, the last recto illustration shows Patty pushing Pearl in a wheelchair. Brianna added something new to the story when she stated, “She’s going to the dentist.”

When Professor’s Tweet hot air balloon began to drift toward Fauxville, the children generated several ideas about possible events.

S: So here he is in the hot air balloon heading for town. What do you think might happen?
Tom: Uh-oh.
S: Why are you going “uh-oh”?
Tom: Because they might crash into the church [points to spire].
Phillip: I think someone is going to pop on there.
José: Yeah, someone is going to pop it. Someone is going to shoot up a gun, then it’s going to pop the balloon.

Sam was also concerned about Professor Tweet floating to Fauxville. He remarked, “I think it is bad because his family might be on this side [of town] and they might miss him.” Frank thought that the Professor was “trying to see if they have bird nests” when he sailed over the rooftops.

The children were quite aghast at Sybil’s driving skills, and they invented some further events with respect to Sybil. Melissa said, “She has to have driving lessons.” Ethan altered the text, including information about Sybil “running red lights.” He stated quite emphatically, “And she is going really fast and each time she is not stopping for the red light. She is going to crash into people.” When Phillip saw the “for sale” sign on Sybil’s car at the end of the book, he remarked, “She’s under arrest and now someone else can use the car. She’s not taking good care of it.”
Another example of the children constructing storylines by inventing possibilities occurred when Albert tied June to the railway switch. The students were well aware of the dangers of this action and hypothesized subsequent events.

S: Now look where June is tied.
Nathan: That’s not good.
S: Why not?
Nathan: Because if she tried to walk away, if she tries to walk away like over the train tracks she could get killed.
Jeremy: She could change the path of the train if she pulls the switch.

**Metafiction and the Child Reader**

The transcript excerpts reveal that the Grade 1 children competently handled the visual and narrative metafictive devices in *Shortcut*. Books with metafictional devices, such as *Shortcut*, provide certain types of “reading lessons” (Meek, 1988) for readers about the construction of narratives by authors, and about their roles as readers. Through multiple experiences with stories, oral and written, readers construct schemata or cognitive representations of various story elements and genres. Children enter school with various oral storytelling traditions and they draw from their oral narrative experiences when they encounter written stories (McCabe, 1997). Therefore, it is important that students have experiences with diverse written and oral narrative structures at school. The European North American linear narrative structure of beginning, middle, and end is one discursive structure. Some students may be more familiar with the narrative structures in picture books with metafictive techniques than with the traditional European North American linear structure. For other students, books with metafictive devices may augment their schemata of narrative structures.

According to structuralists, literary understanding consists of an internalized grammar of story structure and knowledge about the ways that stories work (i.e., literary competences; Culler, 1980). An extensive understanding of “the nature and variety of written discourse” (Meek, 1988, p. 21) will enrich the development of students’ literary competences. The abilities to tolerate ambiguity (Meek, 1988) and to understand irregularities and complexities (Spiro, Coulson, Feltovich, & Anderson, 1994) are fundamental to children’s growth as readers and to their future successful transactions with more sophisticated texts. In reviewing several different approaches that describe the developmental nature of reading fiction, Mackey (1990) wrote
As noted earlier, metafictive devices distance readers from texts. Metafictive narratives can potentially foster reader awareness of “how the processes of fiction are operating as they read” (Mackey, 1990, p. 179). McCallum noted that, “underlying much metafiction for children is a heightened sense of the status of fiction as an elaborate form of play, that is a game with linguistic and narrative codes and conventions” (1996, p. 398). Through their experiences with picture books using metafictive devices, children grow in their abilities as readers, and their metafictive awareness will assist them as they become older and encounter similar devices in other picture books (e.g., Black and White, Macaulay, 1990; Starry Messenger, Sis, 1996; The Stinky Cheeseman and Other Fairly Stupid Tales, Scieszka, 1992), novels (e.g., The View from Saturday, Konigsburg, 1996; Walk Two Moons, Creech, 1996; Holes, Sachar, 1998), movies, television programs, and video games.

Metafictive Devices in Postmodern and Radical Change Literature

The use of metafictive devices has become more widespread with the publication of postmodern fictions (Lewis, 2001): “One can see why metafictive devices are essential to the postmodernist enterprise, with its sustained attack on all manifestations of authoritative order and unity” (p. 94). Among many writers, Goldstone (1998, 2001/2002), McCallum (1996), Coles and Hall (2001), and Yearwood (2002) describe how changes in contemporary children’s and young-adult literature reflect the broader social, cultural, and historical movement referred to as postmodernism. According to Nikolajeva (1988), “an ever-growing segment of contemporary children’s literature is transgressing its own boundaries . . . exhibiting the most prominent features of postmodernism, such as genre eclecticism, disintegration of traditional narrative structures, polyphony, intersubjectivity and metafiction” (p. 222). Goldstone (2001/2002) notes how particular postmodern characteristics found in “postmodern adult literature, fine arts, cinema and popular culture” are also found in picture books (p. 363). Because writers and illustrators have been exposed to “the same postmodernizing influences as everyone else . . . it would be reasonable to suppose that such influences might find their way into books” (Lewis, 2001, p. 99). However, as Lewis notes, it is important to distinguish
between postmodernism, “a cultural and intellectual phenomena” and
metafiction, “an approach, or set of devices, for undermining expecta-
tions or for exposing the fictional nature of fictions” (p. 94): postmod-
ernism in fiction is “an historical phenomenon” and metafiction is “an
a-historical notion” (p. 94).

Eliza Dresang (1999) also writes about changes in children’s and
young-adult literature, and although her Radical Change theory in-
cludes many of the characteristics of postmodern society identified
by the individuals noted previously, she does not use postmodernism
as a context to frame her theory. Rather, Dresang proposes that, “con-
nectivity, interactivity and access in the digital world explain the fun-
damental changes taking place in the body of literature for young read-
ers” (p. 14). Thus, like postmodernism, Radical Change is a historical
phenomenon. Dresang identifies three types of changes in literature
for youth: changing forms and formats, changing perspectives, and
changing boundaries. According to Dresang, books with changing
forms and formats incorporate one or more of the following character-
istics: “graphics in new forms and formats, words and pictures reach-
ing new levels of synergy, nonlinear organization and format, nonse-
quential organization and format, multiple layers of meaning, [and]
interactive formats” (p. 19). Type Two Radical Change, changing per-
spectives, includes “multiple perspectives, visual and verbal, pre-
viously unheard voices, [and] youth who speak for themselves” (p.
24). There is replication between some of the metafictive devices
listed at the beginning of this article and several of the characteristics
identified in Dresang’s changing forms and formats, and changing per-
spectives. Thus, similar to postmodern fiction, it seems that Radical
Change texts often incorporate metafictive devices.

Postmodern and Radical Change texts with metafictive devices can
provide the kinds of reading experiences that develop readers' abili-
ties to critically analyze, construct, and deconstruct an array of texts
and representational forms that incorporate a range of linguistic, dis-
cursive, and semiotic systems. Picture books with metafictive devices
can also contribute to the development of visual literacy skills. Fur-
ther, one can connect the kinds of skills required by web literacy
with reading books with metafictive devices. Web literacy, “finding,
scanning, digesting, and storing Internet information” (Sutherland-
Smith, 2002, p. 663), demands different navigational and reading strat-
egies than traditional printed texts, and indeed, there are some similar-
ities between the strategies and skills required for web literacy and
those required for reading metafiction. Similar to web literacy, texts
with metafictive devices often require attentiveness to information
conveyed in the nontextual features, acquisition of multiple sources
of information, analysis of information, and associative processing
(Sutherland-Smith, 2002). Further, note the similarities to the discussion of the children’s reading of Shortcut, in Sutherland-Smith’s descriptions of what web-based text offer: “permits nonlinear strategies of thinking; allows nonhierarchical strategies; offers nonsequential strategies; requires visual literacy skills to understand multimedia components; is interactive, with the reader able to add, change, or move text; and enables a blurring of the relationship between reader and writer” (pp. 664–665). “The Web invites a nonlinear, interactive, nonsequential approach to reading by students, and the multimedia elements add to the visual literacy skills they require” (p. 668). The syuzhet of Shortcut invites a similar approach to reading, and the illustrations in the book contribute to the development of visual literacy skills.

Texts with metafictive devices, such as Shortcut, offer opportunities for developing new literacies. We have much to learn about how children and adolescents interpret various narrative, discursive, and illustrative devices that distance them from texts, drawing their attention to the artifice of fiction, and that position them in a more interactive and interpretive role as readers.

References

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