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# Recovered Voices: Fairy Tales and the Reading Child

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# RECOVERED VOICES: FAIRY TALES AND THE READING CHILD

by

JENNIFER BEAUMONT LOSSING

(Under the Direction of John Weaver)

## ABSTRACT

In the traditional literature classroom, students are typically guided through literature discussions by their teacher, and then assessed on how well they can reiterate predetermined interpretations of what they have read. Within these literature discussions, “classroom talk” creates a power structure, with the teacher as owner of knowledge, and students as those lacking this knowledge. This study seeks to upset this power structure, by removing the guiding force of the teacher in literature discussions, as well as the assessments which follow. In a further effort to allow for a literature discussion which is genuinely *for* students, the genre of fairy tales will serve as the selected literature. The field of curriculum studies is concerned with recognizing contexts, and working to understand how these many contexts contribute to the education of children. Located within the field of literary criticism, interpretive communities have been selected as a methodology which recognizes a way of looking at students looking at literature through unique perspectives. By allowing students the opportunity to experience literature without the attached traditional activities imposed on them, it is the intent that a novel discourse will be created; one that recognizes and values the interpretation of the child.

INDEX WORDS: Curriculum Studies, Fairy Tales, Literary Criticism,  
Interpretive Communities, Discourse Analysis, Literature Discussions

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## DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to the sweet memory of my father, Thomas Wilson Beaumont, Jr., who taught me the meaning of unconditional love, and who would be so very proud of me right now.

Without the love, support and babysitting services of my family, writing this dissertation would not be possible. First, to my mother Elsa Beaumont, whose energy and spirit never cease to amaze me. Thank you for watching the kids again and again and again! Thank you also for letting me use your computer, printing thousands of drafts for me, meeting me at Staples, etc. Mostly, thank you for always supporting me. For my daughter Mattie Jane, you are pure sunshine. And for my precious baby boy Thomas Beaumont. I have been working on this dissertation for your entire lives. Yes, Mommy is finally finished and we are going to Disney World! For my sister Madeline and my cousin Heather, thank you for being there during the dissertation weeds. And finally to Matthew, my husband of ten years. You have never complained or waived in your support for me during this very long process. You have cooked, cleaned, bathed and tucked in while I have spent countless hours at the computer. Thank you. (I promise the next time you ask me to watch a movie, I will not say I have to go to the library.)

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## CHAPTER 1

### CURRICULUM STUDIES WELCOMES A FAIRY TALE PROJECT

Lives are told in stories. According to Robert Coles, the stories we tell are not only our *rock-bottom capacity*, but also a “universal gift, to be shared with others” (Coles, 1989, p. 30). In fact, for Turner (1996), “our core indispensable stories not only *can* be invented, they *must* be invented if we are to survive and have human lives” [italics added] (p. 14). This need to create stories can be traced to primitive man. In primordial times, man created stories from what was learned from nature. In modern times, however, most are too busy to tell their own stories, but instead reads the stories of others, contained in books. Fortunately, there is still a connection to these modern stories and the experience of life itself. According to Sumara (1996), “there is fundamentally no fixed boundary between the literary fiction and anything else in our environment, for the literary fiction always exists in the not-us world with which we maintain relations” (Sumara, 1996, p. 112). If the stories we read offer a connection to life itself, they should provide a unique perspective on being in the world. For children, who are new to being in the world, this perspective is even more valuable. In order to examine the relationship between children and their stories, it is helpful to turn to a genre of literature which is associated with the child- the fairy tale.

While not originally intended for children, today fairy tales “may be the most important cultural and social event in most children’s lives” (Zipes, 1983, p.1).

Captivating, magical, mystical. The fairy tale is appealing to the child on many levels. The child may be described as a paradox. He is drawn to fantasy, but craves order. This binary is addressed in the fairy tale. While fairy tales provide a fanciful story, filled with

magical people and places, their structure is familiar and safe. Readers are reassured that regardless of the peril along the way, a happy ending is guaranteed. For the safety they provide, fairy tales are in “opposition to an uncertain, confusing, unclear, and menacing reality” (Luthi in von Franz, 1997, p. 75). With a safety net in place, children are free to live the tale. “Having taken the child on a trip into a wondrous world, at its end the tale returns the child to reality in a most reassuring manner. At the story’s end the hero returns to reality- a happy reality, but one devoid of magic” (Bettelheim, 1976, p. 75). The fantasy provided by these whimsical tales allows students to enter another world much different than their own. While fairy tales are shared with many children as early as birth, the logical location for studying the child’s interaction with these tales is in the classroom.

For all of the whimsy and delight associated with the fairy tale, students must certainly be eager to be given these stories in the classroom. But are students actually *given* stories? Traditional literature instruction is associated with teachers holding *discussions* in which students are *guided to acceptable* interpretations of the books they are given to read. Generally, following these discussions come a series of written activities for the students in the form of summaries, comprehension questions and tests. But what would happen if children were actually *given* stories, to do with as they wish? More importantly, what if students were then asked to share their *own* thoughts on what they have read, and were not given *any* follow-up assignments. For many classroom teachers, this nontraditional approach to literature instruction would not appear to be

*instruction* at all. It is the desire to genuinely give students fairy tales (which are intended *for* them) from which this study evolves.

This study seeks to investigate what happens when an unencumbered reading experience of fairy tales is allowed. Unencumbered, for these purposes, will refer to the reading of the stories, without the attached expectations that are generally associated with traditional classroom instruction. Specifically, students will not be guided to specific interpretations of stories. Nor will they be given any follow-up written assignments, with the exception of an evaluation of the project itself. While students will gain their own experience from the reading of the stories, their experience will not be evident until they share these stories. For this reason, the students will be discussing their reactions to what they have read. In order to allow for more voices to be heard, a small discussion group will be formed, specifically, a group of seven fifth grade students will be selected. These students will be chosen based on their ability to read fluently on grade level. I will first interview the students individually in order to determine background knowledge of fairy tales, as well as attitudes toward reading and literature in general. With this knowledge, I will select the fairy tale collection. We will then meet twice each week, covering one story a week, for a total of five weeks. During these meetings, the students will discuss their assigned readings. Students will read simply for the sake of discussing what they read. With this freedom, it is hoped that students will be more likely to share their true responses to literature, as opposed to giving the “right” responses. In addition, it is the expectation that much can be learned about the genre of literature associated with childhood itself.

While the fairy tale has been examined through multiple perspectives, it may at first appear difficult to determine one approach to select. Ironically, however, there is a field which welcomes these multiple possibilities. A study of literature is welcomed by curriculum studies. In fact, there is a special connection between postmodernists (who find a home in curriculum studies), and the story itself. For postmodernists, “arguments in all fields, including science and law, are re-characterized as stories” (Segal, 2004, p. 85). Curriculum studies values the context surrounding issues. It is with the revealing of contexts that a story unfolds. It is stories told in context which will be at the heart of this study. Specifically, how does the story of the fairy tale interact with the story of the child reader? With curriculum studies as a backdrop, the fairy tale in the world of the child can be viewed through many lenses. However, even in a field with overlapping perspectives, it is necessary to locate a position, or approach, to serve as a guide. In selecting an approach which looks at literature, the ideas surrounding curriculum studies must be kept in mind. In other words, the approach must be welcome to many voices, and it must value the position of the child as reader. These requirements are found within the field of literary criticism.

Within the field of literary criticism, there are many ways of looking at literature. These ways of looking deal with how meaning is made when we read. To greatly simplify the field of literary criticism, it can be described as having two opposing extremes. At one extreme are those who value the role of the text in producing and meaning. At the other extreme are those who give the reader sole control in creating meaning. Traditional literature instruction in the classroom is most widely associated

with the former extreme. In order to provide a novel perspective, this study will gravitate toward the other extreme in literary criticism, which values the role of reader in making meaning. However, the reader is not alone in his ability to make meaning from text. Sumatra (1996) also recognizes that the reader is not isolated. "Reading, whether it is done for private or public purposes, must be understood as not only the re-creation of the self, but of the various systems to which that self is relationally bound" (Sumara, 1996, p. 87). In other words, our interpretations are always under the influence of our systems. Fish (1980) calls these systems *interpretive communities*. "It is impossible to take a critical stand outside our interpretive communities, for we are always and inescapably inhabit the beliefs and conventions of our community" (Fish in Raval, 1998, p. 89). These interpretive communities, or all that is going on in the life of the reader to influence his reading experience, will provide the context required for this study.

Now that the context of this study has been explained, a closer look at what this study seeks to learn is necessary. Specifically, where did the fairy tale come from, and why is it associated with children? What is the experience of reading, and how does this come into play when reading the fairy tale? What are some ways of looking at how we discuss what we read? Finally, what are the current roles of students and teachers in the traditional classroom, and how can these roles be unsettled in order to allow for students to have authentic experiences with literature? While traditional literature instruction is consumed with correct interpretations and accurate readings, this study will seek to break these constraints. Students will be allowed to experience literature for the sake of the

experience without the intrusion of upcoming comprehension questions. The experience itself will be the only requirement.

While these questions and more will be answered, the explorations in this study will be led by two guiding questions: *In the elementary classroom, how does the unencumbered experience of reading (and) the fairy tale interact with the child in context? Further, how does discourse created by this reading experience allow the voice of the child to be heard in the classroom?* In order to examine these questions, it will be necessary to first explain how I found myself in the field of curriculum studies. After situating myself in curriculum studies, I will provide a brief history of the field itself, as well as what it means to do research in the field. I will then connect the topics of this study- reading, children and the fairy tale- to curriculum studies. Finally, I will provide a description of the project itself, including an overview of each of the chapters to follow.

#### Situated in Curriculum Studies

The Latin root of the word curriculum is *currere*. “Stated simply, *currere* seeks to understand the contribution academic studies makes to one’s understanding of his or her own life” (Pinar, 2004, p. 520). Based on this definition, William Pinar and Madeline Grumet introduced an autobiographical theory of curriculum, which would allow students of curriculum to “work from within.” For Pinar (2004), “autobiography is a first-person and singular version of culture and history as these are embodied in the concretely existing individual in society in historical time” (p. 38). Pinar provides four steps for a methodology, which will allow the students of curriculum studies to conduct a type of

“work from within.” The first of the four steps is the *regressive* stage. Here, memory of events of the past are revealed. In the second or *progressive* stage, it is necessary to imagine possible futures. For Pinar, the past and the future inhabit the present, so they both should be acknowledged. The third *analytic* stage, requires the analyzation of both past and present. In order to do this, the student must distance himself from the current situation in order to do this analyzation. In the final *synthetical* stage, these discoveries are brought back together. The student puts himself back into the present- where the past and future reside. This method allows students of curriculum could examine not only what is learned at school, but their own life experiences to create a more complete picture. In addition, it is the hope that these realizations will lead to self-transformation.

As a student of curriculum studies, seeking to contribute to the field, it is necessary to acknowledge and pass through these steps. While this method utilizes practices common in psychoanalysis, I am no expert in these areas. However, as I do have a past and present, which must be analyzed and synthesized in order to have an understanding of my current situation, I will attempt to describe myself through these phases. First, the regressive stage requests that I recall events from my past. In the manner of free-association I offer the following: childhood-happy; parents- supportive; family-loving; religion- Catholic; schooling- compliant/successful. For the second stage of progressive, I imagine my future. My goals of having a happy family, doctorate completed, attempting to be an effective and kind teacher. The analytic stage requires distancing me from my current situation in order to analyze both past and present. I have trouble with this stage, because it seems as though we are taught that you can never

actually be removed from your situation, for your judgment to not be tainted by all of your past and present experiences. But in an effort to utilize the methodology of *currere*, I will attempt to distance myself from my situation. The best way to do this, is to imagine that I am a friend of myself. I would certainly consider myself doing too much and having unachievable goals. But when I put myself back into my present, where past and future reside, I thrive in security, familiarity, the known. It is with this background that I was unsettled in the field of curriculum studies.

I am fascinated with words. ““Why are words the thing?’ the child might wonder if he could” (Phillips, 1998, p. 43). While Adam Phillips posits this question from the point of view of the child acquiring language, the question is one I share. The origins of words, the meanings they hide, and reading itself are topics to which I gravitate. As a new second grade classroom teacher, I felt there was more I needed to learn to help my students, and specifically those who were struggling, achieve this magical gift of reading. So I went on to earn a Masters and Education Specialist degree in the field of reading. When I decided to pursue a doctorate in education, I wanted to remain in the field of reading. While I was not quite sure what curriculum studies was, the emphasis of literacy was enough for me to enter the program. As I have read my way through the program, I find myself continuously drawn to the concepts of language, words and interpretation. These themes have found their way into the papers I have written. However, it was not until a class on psychoanalysis introduced me to the complexities of a genre associated with children where I knew that fairy tales would become *my* topic. Now that a location

within curriculum studies has been established, what follows is a brief history of the field itself.

### From Tyler to Text: The History of Curriculum Studies

#### *Bound to Tradition: Curriculum as Development and Instruction*

The publication of Franklin Bobbitt's, *The Curriculum*, is often cited as "the birth of the contemporary curriculum field" (Pinar, et. al., 2002, p. 63). Bobbit's definition of curriculum is "all of the experiences planned and unplanned, that occur under the auspices of the school" (Pinar et. al., 2002, p. 27). While Bobbit's definition generously acknowledges the unplanned experiences that happen at school as a part of the curriculum, it is the *planned* experiences, the subjects "The Curriculum," which concerns those in the traditional field of curriculum. Within the schools, curriculum is presented in sections: the math curriculum, science curriculum, etc. In order to present this curriculum to the students, teachers must be trained in the curriculum, either through workshops, in-services, reading of teacher textbooks, or a combination of any of these. Once the teachers are experts in *The Curriculum*, they are ready to disseminate the information to students, In order to successfully disseminate, they will need instructions.

Curriculum has been attached to instruction, or the "how-to" of teaching. Perhaps one of the most well-known and influential of these how-to models is the Tyler Rationale developed by Ralph Tyler in 1949. Almost synonymous with the traditional field itself, it is "by far the best-known expression of the traditional field's interest in development. The Tyler Rationale provides the guidelines of what was to become the basic lesson plan: objectives, design, scope and sequence and evaluation" (Pinar, et al., 2002, pp. 33-34).

The rationale consists of basic principles, which center around four questions. These equate to the four basic parts of a lesson plan: objectives, design, scope and sequence and evaluation (Pinar, et. al, 2002, pp. 33-34). The fact that this model is still used in schools today is proof of its effectiveness at methodically delivering information. However, it is the information being delivered that has received criticism. “Critics of the rationale pointed to its technicism...and its political naiveté” (Pinar, et. al, 2002, p. 187). The goal of Tyler’s Rationale was to provide teachers with a methodical plan for presenting information. Interestingly, this method of delivery had been receiving criticism over forty years prior to the development of the rationale.

#### *Irrationale: Dewey’s Challenge*

As early as 1902, John Dewey recognized the downfalls of presenting isolated material to students. According to Dewey (1964), this practice would result in what he refers to as “the child v/s the curriculum” (Dewey, 1964). Here, the child is nothing more than a receptacle for the information being delivered. Dewey valued the experience of the child over any information the teacher could package and deliver. He believed there was more to education than fragmented knowledge. The experiences of the child, both within and without the classroom, need to be both provided and understood. According to Dewey, “there is nothing more blindly obtuse than the convention which supposes that the matter actually contained in textbooks of arithmetic, history, geography, etc. is just what will further the educational development of children” (Dewey, 1964, p. 9). In essence, the traditional practice of curriculum development causes the school to departmentalize and isolate subjects. Following “The Curriculum”, the school takes the

child out of context. “He goes to school and studies divide and fractionalize the world for him” (Dewey, 1964, p. 341). While Dewey planted the seeds for questioning the delivery of fragmented “knowledge” to students, it would be another seven decades before a group of collective voices of rebuttal were heard.

### *The Reconceptualization*

In the 1970s, a shift in the way curriculum was viewed began to take place. “The Reconceptualization of curriculum studies began in a critique of the traditional field, a field largely identified with the Tyler Rationale (Pinar, 1994, p. 223). A leader in this new perspective, William Pinar (2002) distinguishes between the traditional curriculum field, and the field of curriculum studies. He defines traditional curriculum development as the tasks of design, implementation, and evaluation. Most of these practices take place within the schools themselves, “directed at school people who want to know ‘how-to,’ it has had to be ‘practical’.” (Pinar in Pinar et. al., 2002, p. 212). In contrast, the purpose of the reconceptualization was that “the function of this work would appear to be understanding, and this understanding is of the sort aimed at and sometimes achieved in the humanities” (Pinar in Pinar et. al., 2002, p. 213). To simplify, the contrast between the two fields is largely based on the practicality or how-to of traditional curriculum verses the theoretical perspectives of curriculum studies. In addition, while the concerns of traditional curriculum remain within the school building, often more specifically with the subjects themselves, curriculum studies seeks to break the bonds of these categories. It looks outside the school to other influences on the curriculum. All voices, especially those in the humanities, are welcomed.

Whereas the opposition between the traditionalists and the reconceptualists is often framed as a debate, this is not the case. “Those in the field of curriculum theory would not wish to *replace* curriculum development. This new focus does not preclude an understanding of curriculum as curriculum development but sees this *understanding* of curriculum as one dimension in a *multi-dimensional* field” [italics added] (Reynolds, 2003, p. 34). Those involved in curriculum studies do not wish to find solutions and answers to issues in curriculum, but instead wish to put education into context. “We can ask for nothing more than the free assembly of diverse points of view in which men and women with mixed motives and with uneven intellectual and rhetorical capabilities will hammer out solutions for this problem or that” (Caputo, 1987, p. 261). The field of curriculum studies looks for the total picture. In other words, the recognition of those external factors which impact the curriculum is of value. There are other considerations for those conducting research in the field of curriculum studies.

*Weighted Words: Research in the Field of Curriculum Studies*

At this point, it should be clear that the field of curriculum studies is concerned with recognizing contexts, and working to understand how these many contexts contribute to the education of children. Those who conduct research within the field are reminded that words themselves are heavy- weighted down with a multitude of interpretations. By pointing out several heavy words before the study, assumptions either can/cannot be made about their meaning. Within this chapter the act of reading will be examined. Words such as *reading* and *text* will carry with them much more association than “the ability to decode and comprehend words” and “a group of words to be read”

respectively. Instead, reading will be understood as an experience which involves many ongoing processes. In addition, the reader will be situated in an interpretive community which will influence his reading. The attitude of the reader at the particular time of reading must also be factored into when reading. Then there is the text itself to be examined. All of these interactions, and the meaning that is derived by the reader in the process, will be intended with the word reading. Likewise, the *text* can be seen simply as whatever is being read. In this case, select fairy tales. However, the text is also part of a situation.

Fairy tales themselves have been selected because of their weight. Filled with magic and fantasy, they hold with them connections to the preliterate times from which they were born. This will be more closely examined in chapter four. *Childhood* is another heavy word. While we use childhood to designate a period of life with which we all automatically are expected to identify, *childhood* is a social construction. This will be examined in chapter three. As the term childhood is used throughout the study therefore, it will be with the intention that the reader will be aware of the constructed nature of the term. While the depth of these words will be examined within their corresponding chapters, as the words are used throughout the study, it is the expectation that they not be taken *lightly*.

“Where would I categorize myself then? What taxonomy should I invent?” (Derrida, 1996, p. 13). While Derrida is speaking facetiously of the tendency to trap one’s identity, he would rather locate several places at once. In the field of curriculum studies, this is possible. Rigid categories are replaced with lines of flights and in-betweens. With

this allowance, scholars are given creative freedom to make approaches their own- embracing those elements which will promote growth of a study, and rejecting those which do not. It is this connection of understanding to *reading text* which brings us to the connections between curriculum studies and reading, children and fairy tales. These intersections will be explained in a project located in the field of curriculum studies.

### Curriculum Studies and Childhood

For those who will be doing the reading, we look at the connection between children and curriculum studies. The most obvious connection to childhood and curriculum studies is that curriculum theorists look at the lives of students, and how they are educated. The student and child in this study are interchangeable. To begin, curriculum theorists would seek to avoid the oversimplification of The child. However, for purposes of discussion it will be difficult to avoid. Associated with the field of curriculum studies is recognizing histories and contexts. “If one distinguishing characteristic of the traditional field was that it tended to be atheoretical and ahistorical, then one distinguishing characteristic of the reconceptualized, contemporary field is that it is profoundly historical” (Pinar, et. al., 2002, p.42). As the stage of life known as childhood has a traceable history, it is worth studying. In addition, childhood is a social construction. Curriculum studies seeks to uncover constructions, and look at what is behind the surface. A closer look at the child is now required.

### *Constructed Childhood*

Prior to the thirteenth century, there is little evidence that any distinction was made between children and adults; the concept of childhood was foreign (Aries, 1962). Today this idea may seem curious. “The feudal worldview contrasts sharply with our own centuries-deep concern with children’s rights, leisure and pleasure” (Kline, 1998, p. 97). However, there were practical reasons why children were treated as adults. The feudal systems demanded that children worked as the adults did to help support the family. Children at one time were considered a “natural resource.” Investment had to be made in the child for many years before he was able to benefit the adult, in the form of what he could provide for the family. Also, the rate of infant and child mortality was high, and therefore parents did not have the luxury of forming strong emotional bonds with their children as they do today (Aries, 1962). Children were not isolated from the activities of adults, no matter how inappropriate these activities may seem now. In fact, the notable ambivalence towards children in fairy tales, according to Hallett & Karasek (2002), is not because there was greater affection felt toward them. Instead, they were actually considered candidates of “adult privilege and status.” While the discovery of childhood began in the thirteenth century, it did not flourish until at least 300 years later. “After the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, childhood was acknowledged to *exist*, to be a feature of the natural order of things” (Postman, 1982, p. 37). How did the distinction of childhood emerge?

While it is difficult to determine history before it is recorded, some evidence of the distinction of childhood is seen in the Greek and Roman cultures. According to

Postman (1982), the Greeks did not invent childhood, but their dedication to education laid the foundation. The Romans followed in their footsteps with the focus on education. “Moreover, the Romans began to make a connection, taken for granted by moderns, between the growing child and idea of shame” (Postman, 1982, p. 9). According to Postman this idea of shame was the first step in the development of childhood. By recognizing the idea of shame for children, they were put in a separate category. Next, from the Romans was the idea that children should be protected by the *ways* of adults. This further supports the idea of shame and what is considered age-appropriate. While the Greeks and Romans seemed to be setting the stage for childhood, the journey suddenly ended during the Middle Ages. “Of all the characteristics in which the medieval age differs from the modern, none is so striking as the comparative absence of interest in children” (Tuchman in Postman, 1982, pp. 18-19). Some have investigated the reasons for this.

Philippe Aries (1962) studies both text and art to find evidence of a distinction of ages, and specifically childhood. After researching art and text, Aries (1962) sees the categorization emerge of what he calls the *ages of life*. “The ages of life did not correspond simply to biological phases but also to social functions” (Aries, 1962, p. 24). He describes these ages as the age of toys, school, love, war and then the sedentary ages. Aries (1962) offers that further proof for the recognition of childhood is the family portrait, which centered around the child in the seventeenth century. “It was in the seventeenth century that portraits of children on their own became numerous and commonplace” (p. 46). Aries (1962) was one of the first to point out a division of ages

associated with social interests. He also discusses the references to children's jargon in the literature, which was not seen prior to this time. While Aries gives examples of the distinction of childhood, others followed to offer explanations for this distinction.

Neil Postman (1982) has a fascinating theory of childhood, which stems from the belief that childhood is a social artifact. He describes an interesting transformation during the Dark and Middle Ages when literacy, education, shame and childhood disappear. In the Middle Ages, age seven is typically the age when a child is considered an adult "because that is the age at which children have command over their speech" [italics removed] (Postman, 1982, p. 13). It is at this point that they can understand the adult, and joined that social group. During the Middle Ages, this use of the alphabet disappeared, and likewise childhood was absent. Like Postman, he agrees on the loss of childhood in Medieval society. "In medieval society this awareness was lacking. That is why, as soon as the child could live without the constant solicitude of his other, his nanny or his cradle-rocker, he belonged to adult society" (Aries, 1962, p. 128). It would seem as soon as the creation of the stage of life called childhood exists, it was distinguished quickly by adulthood.

In our society, one of the most significant landmarks to signify readiness for adulthood is the ability to read. When the printing press was invented in the sixteenth century, and the reading of books was available, a distinction was made between those who could read and those who could not. Postman (1982) describes how literacy may have actually *created* a stage of life known as childhood. He explains this by making the distinction between a non-literate and a literate world:

“In a *non-literate* world there is no need to distinguish sharply between the child and the adult, for there are few secrets, and the culture does not need to provide training in how to understand itself. . . . However, in a literate world to be an adult implies having access to cultural secrets codified in unnatural symbols. In a *literate* world children must become adults.” [italics added]. (Postman, 1982, p. 13)

Therefore, before people were able to read and write, a distinction of childhood was not as clear. Children were included in the same circles as adults. However, with the advent of literacy, a distinction between the haves and the have-nots, this need to acquire literacy a stage of life known as childhood is actually created. These theories of childhood are both constructed and *deconstructed* in the postmodern field of childhood studies.

*Childhood Studies: Deconstructing Childhood*

While many believe the stage of life known as childhood is a biological one, both Canella and Kincheloe (2002) see childhood rather as social constructions. According to Kincheloe, the definition of childhood has been allowed- “uncontested by social forces.” However, social forces are the very things constructing childhood. Specifically, those social forces which will profit from the child. Kincheloe believes the child is strategically located in the market place as a valuable consumer. Large amounts of marketing dollars are spent targeting children as audience in an effort to make money. While children do not have money of their own, of course, it is the control over their parents’ wallets which have the most power. In addition, there is the even more subversive goal of winning children over as customers for life, betting on a nostalgic connection which will last into

adulthood. Ironically, while it is demanded that children delay their entry into the workforce, the age to become a consumer gets younger and younger.

Conflicting signals are being sent to children today. With the information explosion, the boundaries between child and adult roles and competencies begin to blur. Simultaneously, a call is made for a return to childhood innocence as children begin to cross these boundaries. Children often create their own culture, especially in a technological world that cannot be accessed by adults. The life of a child is multilayered. Children as students should not be limited to the predetermined interpretations (made by adults) of the literature they read. In addition, when allowed to make their own interpretations, it should be acknowledged within the context of a life made up of many layers. It is with this philosophy that literature is not “done to” children, but in “partnership with younger human beings” (Canella, 2002). Students will not be kept in the dark on their role in this study. In contrast, they will be asked to open their eyes even wider to inspect the lenses from which they view the world. The reading by the child will be done with fairy tales. Fairy tales will now be linked to curriculum studies.

### Curriculum Studies and the Fairy Tale

The field of curriculum studies welcomes the fairy tale in many ways. In the most basic and traditional sense of curriculum, fairy tales are directly linked to the classroom in that they are generally a type of literature introduced to children. The nature of curriculum studies is not to exclude any topic or field which may find its way into the classroom. Specifically, the reconceptualized field of curriculum is a field largely linked to the humanities. Studies of any genre of literature then would certainly be included. As a way of both literally and figuratively interpreting text, literary criticism has found a

home in curriculum studies. This provides a further connection to the field. For its unique perspective of *text*, a specific connection is made to curriculum studies and the fairy tale: According to Dimitriadis (2001), “texts-whether symbol systems or lived experiences-are always in performance. They contain no essential or inherent meaning but are always given meaning by people, in particular time in particular places” (p. 191). While I would disagree that texts contain no meaning, it is the meaning *making* by people in their particular situations which provide the foundation for this study.

While the fairy tale is complex, it cannot be ignored that there is something *about* the fairy tale which is recognizable by those who read it. For its resistance to capture concepts in nutshells, curriculum studies unsettles essences. It is therefore necessary to recognize an essence on some level in order to categorize the fairy tale as a single genre. Perhaps the best way of dealing with this is provided by Tolkien (1964). In contrast to picking fairy tales apart and analyzing and critiquing them, he has this to say: “I feel that it is more interesting, and also in its way more difficult, to consider what they are, what they have become for us, and what values the long alchemic processes of time have produced in them” (p. 19). While it will be necessary to look at the journey fairy tales have taken, looking at the fairy tale as it is now, situated in the life of the child is where this study begins. While curriculum studies recognizes all fields of study, it has a special bond with those fields related to language, and unraveling text itself.

It is tempting to refer to the fairy tale as a morph. However, “it is important to contrast the *phenomenology* of morphing, its performative elasticity and continual remaking of the self, with the ideology of the *cultural narratives* that contain and situate it” [italics added] (Bukatman, p. 226). It is this phenomena, or *experience* of reading the

tale, along with the cultural narratives which impact this experience, which will be examined. For like the child, “all printed fairy tales are colored by the facts of the time and place in which they were recorded” (Tatar, 1992, p. 19). The child’s interaction and understanding of fairy tales will be situated within cultural contexts. Helpful in this process will be questions Carlson (2002) suggests to ask of all texts: “How does this text represent the world and particular identity groups in the world? What mythologies and narratives frame my own reading and interpretation of texts?” (p. 186). Reading, childhood and fairy tales have been linked to curriculum studies. It is the experience of their interaction within the contexts recognized by curriculum studies, which will serve as the foundation for this study. The project has been described, and the approach defined. Now an outline of the project will be presented as an overview of each chapter.

#### An Overview of Chapters

***In the elementary classroom, how does the unencumbered experience of reading (and) the fairy tale allow interact with the child in context? Further, how does discourse created by this reading experience allow the voice of the child to be heard in the classroom?*** These guiding questions will serve as the foundation for these five chapters. In this introductory chapter, an overview of the topic has been given. Connections have been made between curriculum studies and the main components of this study (reading, literary criticism, children and fairy tales). Curriculum studies deals with ways of looking. For a study dealing with literature, it is necessary to select a way of looking at literature in order to select an approach. This naturally turns us towards literary criticism. Chapter two will therefore examine the branches of literary criticism, specifically those which focus on the role of the reader in the reading process. In order to

conduct a study of children reading literature, chapter three will provide the history of the most recognized genre of children's literature- the fairy tale. Chapter four will settle in the classroom. With the perspective of interpretive communities, I will look at students reading and discussing the fairy tale. Chapter five will conclude with a summary of findings, with new connections being made to the field of curriculum studies. While this first chapter has provided a history of curriculum studies, as well as connections to the field and the components of this study, what follows is a more detailed overview of the remaining four chapters.

### *Chapter Two: Literary Criticism*

In order to select a methodology for examining literature, it is natural to turn to the field of literary criticism. There are two basic extremes in the field of literary criticism. Both deal with the autonomy of the text versus autonomy of the reader. Traditional literary criticism deals with finding the meaning-supplied by the author, to be found in the text itself. Audience-centered criticism offers the other end of the spectrum-relying more on the aesthetics of the text as opposed to the meaning to be located within it. Both extremes have their own criticisms. Traditional criticism is seen as what takes place in the classroom. Approaches which favor the reader may allow too much of the text to mean just anything. Somewhere in the middle can be found a position where the text does not mean only one thing, but also can't mean anything. This position values the reader as a participant in the interpretation process. While I recognize the value of literary criticism, in keeping with the view of curriculum studies, it is important to not be boxed into the categories of any one specific type of criticism. However, while any way of

looking at literature is a form of criticism, for this study, it will be necessary to select a form of criticism as the pathway to discovering what the literature has to offer.

In addition to simply looking at literature, it will be necessary for this study, to look at how literature is read. In response to the notion of an “unchanging and stable text” by the traditionalists and those who have “radically dissolved the idea of the text” on the other extreme. Fish (1980) instead, offers the concept of *interpretive communities*. Fish (1980) leaves formalism, which grants authority to the text, but stops short of giving the reader complete authority. The reader never has total authority, because he is under the conditions of the interpretive community of which he is a part. We are only products of our experiences, and our decisions are made based on our context. According to Fish (1980), we each have cultural assumptions, which influence the way we interpret what we read. This is a position much in line with curriculum theorists. It is this recognition of the text and reader interacting while the reader is also under the influence of his context which forms a framework for this study. While recognizing the main premise of interpretive communities, it is necessary to adapt this critique slightly. It is this method of looking at children reading and discovering which will be simulated in a study of children reading the specific genre of fairy tales.

### *Chapter Three: The Fairy Tale*

#### *Why Fairy Tales?*

There seem to be several connections between the fairy tale and the child. In addition to the aesthetic value of the tale which will ideally appeal to the students, there are additional reasons for selecting the fairy tale genre. First, the evolution of the fairy tale from its oral tradition to its present socially constructed written form mirrors the

evolution of the child. The child begins life with little knowledge of society's expectations. He babbles freely until he is –through language- molded into the expectations of his parents- who are following the expectations of society. Second, the fairy tale today is *intended* for children. Whether fairy tales *are* actually for children can, and has, been argued. However, it is difficult to dispute that the *intention* of the authors distributing fairy tales are doing so with a child audience in mind. In addition, fairy tales are associated with childhood. It is likely that children will have heard or read these stories, perhaps several times. It is this familiarity which will lend itself well to the study. Children will not be caught up with trying to comprehend the story, and will be freed to have a true experience of reading. Finally, while I will not attempt to *capture* the essence of the fairy tale, I will acknowledge it. With this unifying force of the genre, the study will be simplified on some level.

Fairy tales were also chosen in order to retain student interest. If students do not remain *interested* in the literature, the study will be in jeopardy. While all children are unique and have individual interests, the universal aesthetic appeal of the fairy tale cannot be ignored. Georigou (1986) claims that people have an actual aesthetic *need*. According to Georigou, not only do the tales contain aesthetic value, but they “are aesthetic and emotional experiences that transform reality to convey experience... This is the art of the fairy tale- aesthetic transformation” (Georgiou, 1969, p. 197). In addition to the aesthetic appeal, including the ability to entertain, the fairy tale has appeal to children because they are tales to which they can relate. As children are trying to figure out their world, it is often the stories of fantasy which appeal to them. Since fairy tales do not take place in actual settings, they require no prerequisite knowledge. Fairy tales are not expected to

take place in real worlds. Children do not have to have geographical knowledge when a story takes place in a specific region or time period. Also, since the characters are generally portrayed in clear distinctions of good or evil, they are not expected to understand the complexity of a person's character. For children then, a limited knowledge of reality may actually serve as an advantage for enjoying a pure experience of reading the tale.

In chapter three, the fairy tale will be traced from its origins in the preliterate world to the present. Included in this analysis will be the trend of recording and revising fairy tales from the spoken to the written word. Within this shift, much manipulation took place. The reasons for, and effects of this manipulation will be examined in the chapter. There are many who see value in the fairy tale. Besides the connection to children, the fairy tale has captured the attention of adults wishing to study it. Folklorists are concerned with tracing and categorizing tale-types within the stories. Anthropologists examine the tales to determine what can be learned of the culture from which they were derived. Psychoanalysts see the tale as a source of connection to the unconscious, and thus a valuable tool. Then there are those who look at the more covert power of the tales. Those scholars in the field of gender studies seek to expose stereotypes, as well as other social "norms." And there are others who see the fairy tale as being manipulated by society in order to perpetuate ideologies of those in power. These perspectives will be included in this chapter.

*Chapter Four: The Reading of the Fairy Tale by Children in Interpretive Communities*

It is here that children and fairy tales will intersect in the classroom. David Bleich (1988), who is a member of the field of literary criticism is challenged with the

description of his role as a teacher of literature. “For me to teach literature is to teach and learn how a given work may or may not play a role in a culturally and politically situated living person” (Bleich, 1988, p. xiii). He discusses his own background, and how *Death of a Salesman* (1949) spoke to him, and he later found out why (because of the common backgrounds of himself and the author). His analysis of this interpretation: “Just as, for me, “Death of a Salesman” was not Literature (with a capital L) but a slice of my discourse put into a frame and performed on a stage, I assume that literature will play-or fail to play-a similar role for others” (Bleich, 1988, p. xiii). It is in this spirit that fairy tales are presented to children. It is not because this is what children are supposed to be reading, or because there is something specific I want them to take from the literature. Instead, it is hoped that by offering a variety of stories, students may enter their own discourse, provided by their interpretive community.

Parameters can be defined as any factor that defines a system and determines (or limits) its performance. Research in the field of curriculum studies seeks to avoid defined systems with limits. For this reason, there will be few parameters placed on the study before it begins. So that the decoding of unknown words will not interfere with the reading experience, students reading at or above grade level will be selected from fifth grade. The number of students will be determined by those who return consent forms, but ideally will fall between five and ten participants. While multiple copies of the same book will be given to the students, the selection of the actual fairy tale(s) is yet to be determined. Once backgrounds have been learned, and comfort levels established, I will give the group input on the fairy tale to be read. Discussions related to the readings will be the bulk of the study. It is the expectation that students will have a unique experience

when their responses to literature are not attached to predetermined interpretations or comprehension tests. “We pry into these stories, not to *de-mystify* them, for such a thing could never happen, but to look at the range of *potential meanings within the words*, to make us more alive” [italics added] (Lane, 1993, p. 8). These potential meanings will be what are explored in this chapter.

### *Chapter Five: Findings*

In this chapter, conclusions will be made from research findings. These findings will certainly be relevant to the teacher of reading or literature. In addition, however, the teacher of all students will benefit from the understanding of what factors are at play as students read all texts. In this case, both the literal texts- in the form of text books in all subjects for example. Like the oral folk tale, children are close to the original in that their experiences are limited, and they have thus have not yet been completely consumed by the society which seeks to transform them. When reading texts, limited previous experiences by the reader generally present a disadvantage. However, with experiences come opinions, frequently influenced by society. Children with limited experiences may therefore be at an advantage, as they are more likely to experience what Barthes (1973) calls the *pleasure of the text*. “The pleasure of the text is that moment when my body pursues its own ideas- for my body does not have the same ideas I do” (Barthes, 1973, p. 17). This pleasure of the text, untarnished by motivations, will be examined as the child reads the fairy tale.

## CHAPTER 2

## LITERARY CRITICISM: THE LOCATION OF A METHODOLOGY

## What is Literature?

In this study, the fairy tale is the literary genre of choice. While this specific genre has unique characteristics, it falls under the category of literature in general. So what *is* literature is. Can it *be* defined? Eagleton (1983) attempts to sort this out. While he concedes that literature, or literariness, has a *feel*, it cannot be defined. “Literature, in the sense of a set of works of assured and unalterable value, distinguished by certain shared inherent properties, does not exist” (Eagleton, 1983, p. 11). While a universal definition of literature, or at least an objective one, does not exist, Eagleton allows the term, with this disclaimer: “When I use the terms ‘literary’ and ‘literature’...I place them under an invisible crossing-out mark, to indicate that these terms will not really do but that we have no better ones at the moment” (Eagleton, 1983, p. 11). The closest Eagleton comes to creating his own definition of literature is to call it *highly valued writing*. This value must be determined by those who read it. Fish (1980) also weighs in on this idea that the reader is the one who has the final word on what literature is:

“The conclusion is that while literature is still a category, it is an open category, not definable by fictionality, or by a disregard of propositional truth, or by a predominance of tropes and figures, but simply by what we decide it to be. And the conclusion to that conclusion is that it is the reader who ‘makes’ literature.” (Fish, 1980, p. 11)

The value the reader assigns, and what the reader does with this literature will be the focus of the field of literary criticism. This field provides the select methodology for looking at the ways students read literature.

### The History of Literary Criticism

Literary criticism deals with analyzing the act of interpretation. “A text is not a text unless it hides from the first comer, from the first glance, the law of its composition and the rules of its game” (Derrida, 1981, p. 63). In other words, a text, by definition, is that which must be interpreted. And for Derrida at least, this is not a simple process. One of the most puzzling things about interpretation for Culler is that “a literary work can have a range of meanings, but not just any meaning” (Culler, 1980, p. 52). Interestingly, one of the characteristics of those in the field of literary criticism is their desire to separate themselves from serving as a critique. Their intent is to be a strictly objective observer. But this is not possible: “Whatever they do, it will only be interpretation in another guise because- like it or not, interpretation is the only game in town” (Fish, 1980, p. 355). “Interpretation cannot take place unless one assumes that a reading can constitute an advance in knowledge and that there are standards of adequacy which will enable others to see why the reading one proposes is superior to others” (Culler, 1980, p. 47). “Interpretative criticism has no facts to explain nor any explicitly standard of success; its goal is to produce interpretations that are new enough to be interesting but not so radically new as to prove unacceptable” (Culler, 1980, p. 50).

Much has been said on the subject of interpretation. While it has been known that humans interpret, the necessity to *analyze* this act is a relatively recent discovery. In fact, the establishment of literary theory “created an awareness of the variety and changing

validity of interpretation, thereby changing interpretive practice in humanities altogether” (Iser, 2006, p. 1). Rather than look at interpreting using feelings alone, literary theory attempts to offer an objective approach. “Theory became a means of preventing and unraveling the confusion created by impressionistic criticism” (Iser, 2006, p. 3). There are those who criticize the field, arguing that it has a *parasitic* nature, as it feeds off of an established body of work. Northrop Frye (1957), who is credited with establishing literary criticism as a legitimate field, speaks against this criticism. He instead defends the necessity of criticism, claiming literature cannot speak for itself. Like Frye, Eagleton (1983) offers an even deeper purpose for the field. According to him, literary criticism should serve “a potentially transformative understanding of experience, one that will read texts not simply as objects to be aesthetically contemplated or endlessly deconstructed but as practice embedded in social purposes” (Raval, 1998, p. 157). In other words, literary theory is more than just about interpretation itself, but how this interpretation can transform the reader, and even society. The various perspectives within the field of literary theory will be examined within the context of a study linked to curriculum theory.

Nowhere are the parallels seen as clearly between the two fields of literary criticism and curriculum theory as they are in Terry Eagleton’s book, *Literary Theory: An Introduction* (1983). In it, Eagleton summarizes the field of literary criticism, as it transforms from Formalism, New Criticism, Phenomenology, Structuralism, Reader-Response and Post-Structuralism. Whether to be embraced or critiqued, these philosophies are found within the field of curriculum studies (Pinar, et al., 2002). While literary criticism deals with interpreting texts, the way interpretation is viewed is what separates these theories of literary criticism. In other words, these theories become *ways*

*of looking* at literature. As the field of curriculum studies is quick to point out, trends or perspectives do not exist in isolation, contained within their own boundaries until the next philosophy is created. Eagleton (1983) illustrates this when he says, “any such theory of history or language as a simple linear evolution misses the web-like complexity of signs...the back and forth, present and absent, forward and sideways movement of language in its actual processes “(Eagleton, 1983, p. 132). The recognition that boundaries are fluid should be kept in mind as the philosophies of literary theory are examined.

While the areas within the field of literary criticism overlap, there are two obvious extremes. These extremes deal with the autonomy of the text versus the autonomy of the reader. Traditional literary criticism deals with finding “the” meaning, supplied by the author, to be found in the text itself. Audience-centered criticism offers the other end of the spectrum. It values the role of the reader, and how he reacts to the text, as opposed to the meaning to be located within it. Both extremes have their own criticisms. Traditional criticism may be considered too rigid, with its predetermined interpretations of author’s meaning. In contrast, audience-centered criticism may receive critique for allowing the reader to interpret the text as meaning anything he or she wishes. Edward Said (1983) illustrates this tension between author and critic:

“The tension between an individual author, as an irreducible existence, and the institutions of literature to which the writing contributes is, of course, an implicit one, always to be taken into account by the critic. This tension is exploited, rather than tolerated, by critical methods whose bias stresses the anterior privilege’s of the writer’s experience to his finished product” (p. 55)....

Somewhere in the middle of these two extremes there can be found a position that is appropriate for this study. One in which the text does not mean only one thing, but also must mean *something*. This position values the reader as a participant in the interpretation process, while remaining connected with the text itself. The search for this balanced approach will be the focus here. On the path to selecting this approach, the remainder of this chapter will explore the various perspectives within the field of literary criticism.

### Critical Orientations: From Author to Reader

#### *Formalists*

Traced to Russia, the formalists could be called the founders of literary criticism. Formalists are also known as traditionalists because they represent the most traditional view of interpretation- that of finding the intended meaning of the author. What distinguishes literature from ordinary language for formalists is the use of literary devices. Through these methods, formalism became in a sense, an application of linguistics to the study of literature (Eagleton, 1983). Literary devices such as symbolism and metaphors lend themselves to being interpreted. Through this interpretation, formalists believe they can determine the intended meaning of the author. The formalist approach is a seemingly sterile one, in that it avoids content itself, which could be linked to psychology or sociology. “The literary work was neither a vehicle for ideas, a reflection of social reality nor the incarnation of some transcendental truth: it was a material fact, whose functioning could be analysed rather as one could imagine a machine” (Eagleton, 1983, p. 3). They did not deny that there was a “social reality” connected to literature, they just believed this was not “the critic’s business” (Eagleton, p. 3). If this method of critiquing literature sounds familiar, that is because it is the approach

most widely used in traditional classrooms today. As it is his/her intended meaning which seems to be the prize for many of those beginning the field of literary criticism, this concept of author's intention should be more closely examined.

### *The Author*

In *Validity in Interpretation* (1967), E. D. Hirsh makes the argument that the text has one meaning, supplied by the author. Hirsh believes in a single meaning to be found. In fact, he has been linked to Husserl in that he shares the phenomenological view that meaning exists before there are words to describe the meaning (Eagleton, 1983). This meaning is created by an author. Hirsh says there is no meaning in words themselves and that there can be any guess to the author's meaning. However, he claims that if we do agree on "A" meaning, we must also agree that this is the author's intended meaning. Hirsch sticks to his point so strictly because without it, there would be no *norm* of interpretation. He speaks out against the danger of the reader attempting to create his own meaning:

"When critics deliberately banished the original author, they themselves usurped his place, and this led unerringly to some of our present-day theoretical confusions. Where before there had been but one author, there now arose a multiplicity of them, each carrying as much authority as the next" (Hirsh, 1967, pp. 5-6).

Hirsh does allow the reader *some* value. He says readers can play a role, in that they can attribute *significance* to this meaning, but only authors can produce it.

I do agree with Hirsh that his perspective eliminates confusion. And I do not disagree that the author has an intended meaning when he creates the text. Where I

disagree with Hirsh, however is on the need to *find* this meaning. In fact, if “the” meaning is in fact found, what then? The reading experience can be about more meanings than those of the author. Eagleton also refutes Hirsh’s narrow view of meaning:

“Meanings are not as stable and determinate as Hirsh thinks, even authorial ones—and the reason they are not is because, as he will not recognize, they are the products of language, which always has something slippery about it. It is difficult to know what it could be to have a ‘pure’ intention or express a ‘pure’ meaning; it is only because Hirsch holds meaning apart from language that he is able to trust such chimeras. An author’s intention is itself a complex ‘text,’ which can be debated, translated and variously interpreted, just like any other” (Eagleton, 1983, p. 69).

Hirsh’s necessity of finding the author’s intent represents the first end of the spectrum in the field of literary theory. The response to the rigidity of the formalists, however, was about to be met with something New.

### *New Criticism*

Beginning in the 1930s, the shift towards New Criticism can be seen as a response to formalism. New Criticism is widely associated with the I.A. Richards (1960), and his idea of a *practical* criticism. While Richards had a foundation in science, he saw some deficits in the solutions science could offer the field of literary criticism. In the case of literature, there was more to be discovered than the previous approach of formalism had provided. The famous *fallacies* of Wimsatt and Beardley’s (1946) provide the foundation for the field of new criticism. The *intentional fallacy* is an argument against there being an intended meaning provided by the author. It was a “violation of the idea

that the meaning was in the text, rendering attempts to impute authorial intentions or even to seek out an author's statements of intention as wrongheaded" (Beach, 1993, p. 15).

Along with the intentional fallacy came the *affective fallacy*, which was "any consideration of the idea of the reader's emotional reactions as constituting the meaning" (Beach, 1993, p. 15). With these two fallacies, both the meaning of the author, as well as the meaning provided by the reader, are insufficient. What remains? The answer is the text itself.

If the role of both author and reader are dismissed in new criticism, it may seem as though interpretation is obsolete. However, there is a brand of interpretation linked to new criticism. *Close readings* become the method of interpretation for new critics. Eagleton (1983) describes close readings as "detailed analytic interpretation, providing a valuable antidote to aesthetic chit-chat" (p. 44). Largely concerned with poetry, the general idea of the new critics was that literature, and more specifically the poem, cannot be dissected and examined for form and style. Instead, the work must be appreciated as a whole, for the object itself. It could not be paraphrased or broken apart, but contemplated and appreciated. Neither the intent of the author or the emotional response of the reader were to be considered. "The poem meant what it meant, regardless of the poet's intentions or the subjective feelings the reader derived from it" (Eagleton, 1983, p. 48). It is difficult to conceive of a method of interpretation which allows the text to just *be*. However, the new critics dominated theory for much of the middle third of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Like the other theories, new criticism was approached passionately, and did not have rational roots. It is interesting that new criticism was trying to legitimate itself in

American society, where science was the order of the day. It is for this reason that new criticism did not survive. New criticism was in a tricky position. To have any value, it had to be linked to reality in some way. “New Criticism, in other words, stopped short of a full-blooded formalism, awkwardly tempering it with a kind of empiricism- a belief that the poem’s discourse somehow ‘included’ reality within itself” (Eagleton, 1983, p. 47). However, the theory did not really explain how it was connected to reality. Covering both extremes, new criticism “surrenders the text from rational discourse and a social context” (Eagleton, 1983, p. 52). In order to survive, new criticism needed to become more systematic and scientific. Structuralism was the answer.

### *Structuralism*

While not specifically linked to structuralism, Frye’s *Anatomy of Criticism* (1957), recognizes the systems of literature. He wrote these systems as four narrative categories which could be linked to the seasons. For Frye, all literature is cyclical. For the system to survive, it must be closed. It is its own history. Structuralism is about the analyzing of literature, not the evaluation of it. Like the new critics, structuralists do not rely on the context of the text. For this reason, it could protect itself from society, and also became an escape from it. The process is purely scientific and removes content and obvious meaning from stories. Structuralism became a rejection of that which was associated with the Enlightenment, which valued the individual. For structuralists, the subject was the system. While structuralism seems to be advancement over new criticism, it still remains in isolation:

“Having characterized the underlying rule-system of a literary text, all the structuralist could do was sit back and wonder what to do next. There was no

question of relating the work to the realities of which it treated, or to the conditions which produced it, or to actual readers who studied it, since the founding gesture of structuralism had been to bracket off such realities” (Eagleton, 1983, p. 109).

Structuralism values the structure of the text, and disregards all outside, including the reader. The next theory of criticism values the reader, but remains isolated from context. In contrast, phenomenologists recognize context, in the form of experience.

### *Phenomenology*

While phenomenology as a philosophy has a complex history, the task of untangling that history will not be taken on. However, phenomenology as a theory within the field of literary criticism is worth mentioning. For phenomenologists, objects do not exist independently of ourselves. Anything that we cannot ourselves experience consciously must be blocked out. “All realities must be treated as pure ‘phenomena’, in terms of their appearances in our mind, and this is the only absolute data from which we can begin” (Eagleton, 1983, p. 55). It is based on the idea that the subject is to be seen as the source and origin of all meaning. The context of the work or the reading of it at the time is irrelevant to the phenomenologist. Of importance is the experience at the time of reading. For phenomenologists, “criticism is not seen as a construction, an active interpretation of the work which will inevitably engage the critic’s own interests and biases; it is a mere passive reception of the text, a pure transcription of its mental essences” (Eagleton, 1983, p. 59). In other words, the meaning of the text is not dependent on the language, but on the experience of the reader at the time of reading. While the intuitive nature of phenomenology comes a step closer towards valuing the

reader, it does not recognize the influence of other factors for the reader. These other factors cannot be “bracketed out” for this study. While varying in degrees, the previous approaches have favored autonomy of the author, or text over autonomy of the reader. Before tipping the scales completely from text to reader, it is important to examine the concept of this reader.

### *The Reader*

According to Eco (1997), for an author to be able to create a text, he must imagine the model of a reader who has the capacity to interpret what he has written. This model reader must be able to “deal interpretatively with the expressions in the same way as the author deals generatively with them” (p. 7). This reader can be selected either implicitly or explicitly by the text. “In the process of communication, a text is frequently interpreted against the background of codes different from those intended by the author” (Eco, 1979, p. 8). While the reader is an imagined one, he will not always be exactly what the author intended. Who is THE reader? According to Beach (1993), in most cases, “‘the reader’ is an imagined extension of these theorists’ own reading experiences...the writer or critic proposes an interpretation and then presumes that ‘the reader’ will make the same interpretation” (p. 5). In other words, a theory is perpetuated through an imagined reader. For Fish (1980), the reader is anyone who exhibits “linguistic competence.” This linguistic competence is that which we all share that allows us to be a part of a community of readers. All of these descriptions of the reader place these nameless, faceless readers into the same category. In the case of this study, where students will be readers, Rosenblatt speaks to the tendency of teachers who practice this generalization. “Rosenblatt argues that teachers need to help specific human beings- not some

generalized fiction called the student- to discover the pleasures and satisfactions of literature” (Beach, 1993, p. 51). It is this generalizing which postmodernists wish to debunk in their analysis of readers.

Postmodernists are concerned with the identity of the reader who is “subjected to multiple, competing discourses that shape identity” (Beach, 1993, p. 41). In other words, what is happening *beyond* the reader to influence interpretation? Derrida (1981) has many questions to deconstruct the concept of The reader. In reference to this reader, he asks: “In spite of him? Thanks to him? In his text? Outside his text? But then where? Between his text and that language? For what reader? At what moment?” (Derrida, 1981, p. 96). In other words, there are many levels to individual readers. Their input is valuable and important. In addition, the context which creates their interpretations should be examined and acknowledged. For text-autonomous perspectives, “rescuing the text from author and reader went hand in hand with disentangling it from any social or historical context” (Eagleton, 1983, p. 48). For the next set of literary theories, the reader is about to become re-entangled.

### *Reader Response Theories*

“The view that a text cannot live in isolation from a context of reading and response has acquired the force of a cliché mainly because the text’s natural companion, the reader, slips so easily into the category of that which goes without saying” (Freund, 1987, pp. 2-3). The reader’s reaction to text is important. However, the role of reader is trivialized, dismissed or even ignored in the earlier literary critical approaches. A shift was made, however, in the field of literary criticism which focused on audience-oriented or *reader-response* criticism (Beach, 1993). She calls this shift a “quiet revolution” in the

field of literary criticism. If a turning point had to be defined within the field, it may be the meeting of the Modern Language Association in 1975. The topic of “The Reader in Fiction” brought the reader into a new light, and ignited the conversation in the field of literary criticism. While reader response theorists are diverse within their own camp, what they share could be characterized as “a concern with how readers make meaning from their experience with the text” (Beach, 1993, p. 1). These views will be examined here.

In *The Reader in the Text: Essays on Audience and Interpretation*, Suleiman and Crosman (1980) compile a series of original essays by those dabbling in the field of audience based criticism, or reader response criticism. These essays examine the shift towards the role of the reader in literary criticism. These essays concern the “theoretical and practical implications of the notion of *reader-* and more generally of *audience-* in literary texts” (Suleiman & Crosman, 1980, p. vii). The focus of all these essays can be narrowed down to this one critical statement:

“What are the codes and conventions –whether aesthetic or cultural- to which actual readers refer in trying to make sense of texts and to which actual authors refer in facilitating or complicating, or perhaps even frustrating, the reader’s sense-making activity?” (Suleiman & Crosman, 1980, p. 12).

While those who favor an audience-centered approach often get placed into one category, there are differences, specifically related to the role of the reader, within this branch of criticism.

Of the reader response theories- the triangle of context, reader, and text is surrounded by five perspectives. These are reader response theory; textual, or the reader’s

knowledge of conventions; experimental, or the reader's engagement of experience; social, or the readers' social role and perceptions of the social context; psychological, or the reader's cognitive or subconscious processes; and cultural, or the reader's cultural role, attitudes, contexts (Beach, 1993). It is important to recognize that these categories are not mutually exclusive. "The local- the focus on readers' textual knowledge and experience- is embedded within the global, larger social and cultural contexts" (Beach, 1993, p. 9). In other words, the multiple theories are always overlapping. In selecting an approach which values the reader, all of these elements will be considered. Specifically, the value of the child reader will be considered. As there are not many examples of those who have put reader-response theory into practice in the classroom, the first reader-response theorist is of significance.

*Literature as Exploration: Louise Rosenblatt*

Louise Rosenblatt is associated with reader response theory. Her contributions to the field are unique in that she attempts to put theory into practice, by suggesting what teachers can do for students in their reading of texts. Perhaps because she was a woman, or that she was mainly drawing from the work of Americans- John Dewey and William James, Rosenblatt did not receive much credit during the time of her work. Instead, there is renewed interest in her work several decades after her work in the classroom.

Rosenblatt is most often associated with the *experiential* component of reader-response theory. She looks at reading as *event* and deals with cognitive processes. She points out the two modes of experiencing a text: "efferent" and "aesthetic" Efferent is the need to acquire information. Aesthetic refers to responding with your own experiences in mind (Beach, 1993, p. 50). Rosenblatt claims that this type of responding is stifled in

traditional classrooms. According to Rosenblatt, teachers can set the stage for experiential responses. They need to get away from expecting only efferent.

Since literature concerns humanity, for Rosenblatt ways of looking at humanity must be utilized. Therefore, the fields of psychology and sociology must be included for the student to have a true reading experience. Rosenblatt favors transaction, a term coined by Dewey, to explain the processes between reader and text. This transaction is described as “a process in which the elements are aspects or phases of a total situation” (Rosenblatt, 1995, p. 26). She offers this concept in contradiction to an *interaction*, which involves the printed page impressing meaning on the reader’s mind or reader extracting meaning from text. Meaning is then, not IN the text or IN the reader. “Both reader and text are essential to the transactional process of meaning making” (Rosenblatt, 1995, p. 27). For Rosenblatt, this transactional model serves as a means of interpretation. As opposed to the use of conventions to interpret, readers should instead use emotions, attitudes, beliefs and interests. Out of this complex process emerges a more or less organized “imaginative experience” (Rosenblatt, 1995, p. 24). “The students valued literature as a means of enlarging their knowledge of the world, because through literature they acquire not so much additional *information* as additional *experience*” (Rosenblatt, 1995, p. 38). Students can then look at literature as an approach to life.

In Rosenblatt’s work, we begin to see not only the importance given to the reader’s perspective, but this perspective is also seen within a social context. “The uniqueness of the transaction between reader and text is not inconsistent with the fact that both elements in this relation have social origins and social effects” (Rosenblatt, 1995, p. 27). Literature also includes a framework of values and ethics. Students should be able to

give primary responses to text- not ones that are connected to the background knowledge of the text itself, or the research they have done prior to the reading. But instead give credence to their own personal backgrounds as having impact in interpretation.

Rosenblatt's acknowledgement of student perspectives, as well as the external experiences of students causes her work to be of value to this study. Rosenblatt's work is in response to a traditional approach to teaching literature in the classroom, which stifles the explorations to be made by the reader. The next reader-response theorist also seeks to provide a new approach to studying literature.

*Making the Private Public: Dennis Sumara*

In contrasting the act of reading to literary criticism, Freund (1987) says this: "Indeed, there is even some doubt whether 'reading,' as opposed to 'criticism,' produces anything more than neurological reactions" (Freund, 1987, p. 4). In other words, there is nothing to reading other than what we make of it. It has already been pointed out that this "what we make of it" is literary criticism itself. Reading becomes the basic function of the brain, and interpretation another level of thinking. In *Private Readings in Public* (1986), Sumara contends that this level of interpretation cannot occur until what has been read is shared with others. When the sharing occurs, interpretation takes place. It is not until this next step of talking, or writing, about what is read which demands the interpretive process. While the field of literary criticism itself struggles with the conflict between the objectivity and subjectivity of interpretation, this conflict is reflected in the silence verses sharing of reading itself: "The inherent privacy and silence of reading have no doubt encouraged a tendency to suppress the embarrassment of subjectivity, placing it beyond the pale of a critical decorum which aspires to be objective" (Freund, 1987, p. 3).

The fear of getting the interpretation *wrong* causes reading to remain a silent act- where it is comfortable. Sumara wishes to break the silence for students.

In addition to acknowledging that interpretation occurs when silent reading is allowed to speak, Sumara recognizes that the experience of reading literature cannot be separated from the experience of life itself. It provides an interpretive location dependent upon everything going on –including the past- in a person’s life. Sumara “wishes to render visible the largely invisible architecture of human/textual/contextual relations which emerge from the location announced by the presence of the literary tale” (Pinar, et al., 2002, p. 437). This location of the tale is its place in culture. This culture not only affects the text, but the reader as well. The curriculum neutralizes in order to unify. In doing so, individual experiences, and thus real interpretation, is not fostered in classrooms. Sumara is interested in shared readings, and notes that the upcoming appointment to share the reading demands a dwelling on the work after a private reading. This dwelling may not have occurred otherwise, if the sharing were not to occur.

Sumara describes his writing as postmodern because he is “not claiming (or aiming) to present a unified, fixed and or complete theory of reading or of shared reading in schools” (Sumara, 1996, p. 12). He acknowledges that all of his questions and interpretations are bound to the contexts of history, culture and social situations. He does not wish to present a “seamless report of shared reading events” (Sumara, 1996, p. 13). The work of Sumara is similar to that which will be attempted in this study. Students will read fairy tales with each other. This level of making the public private will allow students to put criticism into practice. In addition, Sumara recognizes the context of the reader in the interpretation process. “Reading, whether it is done for private or public

purposes, must be understood as not only the re-creation of the self, but of the various systems to which that self is relationally bound” (Sumara, 1996, p. 87). These systems will be recognized as well.

The works of Rosenblatt and Sumara fall under the heading of reader response criticism because of the role the reader takes in the interpretation process. In addition, both Rosenblatt and Sumara are aware of the context of the classroom. I too wish to examine the experience of students reading literature, and focusing on what the experience does for them, without any connection to comprehension questions or a test to follow. While Rosenblatt and Sumara have attempted to move reader response theory into practice, it is a practice that is not widespread (Beach, 1993). This study will offer an attempt to continue reader response practices in the classroom. While only an overview, the spectrum in literary theory- from formalism to experiential reader response theory- has been traveled. For a more detailed look at the role of the reader, in the context of his external factors, we now turn to the approach which will best serve this study.

#### *Interpretive Communities- The Selected Approach*

Stanley Fish (1980) is a literary critic who has undergone a transformation. It could be said that Fish wishes to expose the literary critics (of whom he is one) to the subjectivity they practice but deny. Stephen Booth is one literary critic Fish seeks to expose. An example: of Shakespeare’s sonnets, Booth declares that he is not going to attempt to do what those before him have done and interpret what they mean; he instead is only going to *describe* them, and therefore not project his own interpretations. He also wishes to point out *why* they are so valuable. Fish however, recognizes the transparency of Booth’s argument. Fish says that while Booth is claiming to innocently *present* the

text, “it is actually a gesture in which one set of interpretive principles is replaced by another that happens to claim for itself the virtue of not being an interpretation at all” (Fish, 1980, p. 353). By dismissing the idea that finding meaning is now not as important as just the experience of reading them, Booth is making his own assumptions. This denouncement of subjectivity is not unique in the field. “By a logic peculiar to the institution, one of the standard ways of practicing literary criticism is to announce that you are avoiding it” (Fish, 1980, p. 355). It is this avoidance of criticism by literary critics with which Fish struggles.

While exposing literary critics, Fish takes a personal journey. Feeling torn between supporting the autonomy of the text versus the autonomy of the reader, Fish seeks to find a comfortable place somewhere in between. The evolution of his thoughts on the subject is documented in *Is There a Text in this Class* (1980). In the book, Fish describes his discomfort with the text as the only source of meaning. But he also cannot completely cross over to allowing the text to be completely in the hands of the reader. Fish finds himself caught in the middle of finding the meaning *in* the text, or *in* the reader. While grappling with these two extremes of literary criticism, he makes discoveries of both the reader and the text. Fish is eventually able to leave formalism, and focus on the experience of the reader. However, he is then faced with the problem of the multitude of experiences for *all* readers. In grappling with the problem of the multiplicity of all readers, Fish still seeks to find a comfortable perspective of literary criticism. He must recognize the value of the interpretation of individual readers, without becoming bogged down by the interpretations of *each* reader.

For Fish, interpretation has to be tamed on some level. The idea that each and every reader's interpretation can be dealt with is too daunting to accomplish. He must therefore normalize the field of interpretation in some way. Fish is able to do this through the use of language itself. For curriculum theorists, who feel that language both demands and resists interpretation, normalizing language is a lofty goal. However, Fish suggests that readers share a certain level of understanding in that they all share the knowledge of language, and have internalized all the rules associated with it. This makes the reading of the text itself uniform. He calls this *linguistic competence*, or "a linguistic system that every native speaker shares" (Fish, 1980, p. 5). In other words, there is a basic level- attributed to our shared language- in which we all share the same basic interpretation of the text- the words themselves. Within these parameters, the text can mean many things for many readers, but the language itself prevents it from meaning *anything*. Fish (1980) offers this example of how the text limits the interpretation:

"An infinite plurality of meanings would be a fear only if sentences existed in a state in which they were not already embedded in, and had come into view as a function of, some situation or other. But there is no such state; sentences emerge only situations, and within those situations, the normative meaning of an utterance will always be obvious or at least accessible." (Fish, 1980, p. 307)

In other words, with a different set of background knowledge about the author, or set in a different historical period, the same sentences could take on a completely different meaning, but they would still be bound to the conventions of that time. So while it is not that text can mean anything, it is that it has the *potential* to mean anything, given a different context.

While Fish wishes to contain multitudes of interpretations, it is important to maintain that Fish acknowledges that individual interpretations are valuable. It is the thoughts *about* the interpretation of what we have read which differs from one person to the next. It is this secondary level of interpretation, for Fish, that include the emotional responses to reading. Further, these emotional responses are influenced by the various external factors affecting the reader at the time of his/her reading. It is this combination of the belief that the text is confined to the interpretations that the words will allow, along with the addition of the external factors of the reader influencing interpretations which brings us to the resting place of the selected approach for this study: interpretive communities.

According to Fish,

“Indeed, it is interpretive communities, rather than either the text or the reader, that produce meanings and are responsible for the emergence of formal features. Interpretive communities are made up of those who share interpretive strategies.... In other words these strategies exist prior to the act of reading and therefore determine the shape of what is read rather than, as is usually assumed, the other way around.” (Fish, 1980, p. 14)

In other words, interpretive strategies are provided by the context of the reader. And interpretive *communities* are unique for each reader. So while interpretations may be seen as the free choice of the reader, these interpretations are made only within the boundaries of the knowledge of the reader within his interpretive community. Freund (1987) also explains this position: “The reader, who is at once interpreter and interpretation, is always situated inside a system of language, inside a context of

discursive practices in which are inscribed values, interests, attitudes, beliefs” (p. 109). This would include background knowledge, especially in the case of children who may not be aware of all of the knowings of society. Even when the reader is free from the predetermined meaning of the text, he is not free of the constraints of his possible interpretations.

While the interpretive communities of the reader open up interpretations, they limit them as well. Interpretive communities are based on what is acceptable *to think*. In an interpretive community, the interpretation is not of the individual alone, but by a “public and conventional point of view” (Fish, 1980, p. 14). It is this conventional point of view that is taken for granted. It is the “what is acceptable” that governs our decisions. Fish (1980) calls these “canons of acceptability” (p. 349), or what society’s conventions are at a given time. This changes not only in historic time periods, but also within different settings. For example, what is acceptable to interpret within the walls of the classroom is different than in a book club of a group of women friends. These interpretive communities influence interpretation. Groups of high achieving fifth graders will offer another interpretive community. It is not to say that unique responses cannot be given within these contexts, but these contexts do provide unspoken parameters.

There are others, within the reading response camp, who support this idea of the reader not being in isolation of his own language and thoughts. According to Rosenblatt (1995), “language is socially evolved, but it is always constituted by individuals, with their particular histories” (p. 25). Freund (1987) says that our categories of perception are “encoded in language, institutionalized, already in place, they exist prior to the act of reading” (Freund, 1987, pp. 107-108). She goes on to say that the authority of text is

replaced by authority of reader is replaced by authority of the symbolic order (Freund, 1987, p. 105). Suleiman & Crosman (1980) also recognize interpretive communities as a starting point. Of the approach they say, “it is precisely around this notion that I believe a most fruitful combination of critical approaches to reading and interpretation can be realized” (p. 21). These positions all support the idea that readers do not interpret in a vacuum.

It should be explained at this point, that placing interpretive communities in the field of curriculum studies is a precarious task. While those in the field place an emphasis on allowing work to be autobiographical, and thus acknowledging histories, race, gender, culture, they do not wish to categorize. These will all be included in the understanding of an interpretive community. The term itself can be misleading, as it tends to swallow up all its members, and by doing so cover them under the same headings: students, children, readers. However, my intention is quite the opposite. Freund (1987) makes this clarification in the name of Fish: “By ‘interpretive communities’ Fish does not mean a collective of individuals but a bundle of strategies or norms of interpretation that we hold in common and which regulate the way we think and perceive” (Freund, 1987, p. 107).

In this study, it is the interpretive community of an *individual*; his responses to literature, with all of his contexts attached to that interpretation. How this will be recognized is not in a description of responses, as that would require normalizing the findings in order to point out what was caused by race, etc. This is impossible as we cannot separate ourselves from the fabric of what makes us who we are. Rather, these readings will be *allowed*. Responses will not be scored, itemized, categorized, rated or judged. Grades will not be given. Instead, students will be asked to create interpretations,

simply for being allowed to dwell with the text. A more unique perspective in the classroom does not exist. While fairy tales have been written *for* children, it is clear that they are not for them. This study allows the tales to be for them. A literary critical approach, such as interpretive communities, which recognizes histories and contexts should be welcomed under the heading of postmodernism.

#### Interpretive Communities in Practice

“The two partners in the communication process, namely, the text and the reader, are far easier to analyze than is the event that takes place between them (Iser in Suleiman & Crosman, 1980, p. 107). The intent of this project is to examine what takes place between the text of the fairy tale and the child reader. Unique responses will be encouraged and valued. “There is no such thing as a generic reader or a generic literary work; there are only the potential millions of individual readers of the potential millions of individual literary work” (Rosenblatt, 1995, p. 24). Following the suggestion of Rosenblatt (1995), “the teacher’s task is to foster fruitful interactions-or more precisely, transactions- between individual readers and individual literary texts” (p. 26). While it will certainly require some practice, and “undoing” of familiar procedures related to interpreting literature, and completing literature assignments, the goal is for the limits of predetermined interpretations to be removed. “The postmodern theorists celebrate the reader’s own *independence from conformity* to externally dictated text conventions associated with the ‘work’ as the physical book and the ‘text,’ which the reader creates” [italics added] (Beach, 1993, p. 43). This study will attempt to give students the independence as well as the forum for creating their own texts.

Students will be experiencing the unique brand of literature known as the fairy tale, which will be studied within context. For the role it plays in the interpretive process, reader response criticism is selected. More specifically, contexts the students both do and don't share will be examined under the umbrella of interpretive communities. This study will not resemble traditional literature classrooms, which generally embodies the formalist approach to interpretation, which finds it necessary to locate the author's intended meaning. Eagleton pokes holes in this necessity. "Are authors always in full possession of their own meanings?" (Eagleton, p. 48). By not discussing what is *meant* by "the prince in the woods," but what this story does for *you*? How do the words put together bring to *you*? In addition, students will be encouraged to examine what other factors- outside the text- may have influenced their analysis. For, a reader, like a sentence is "never not in context. We are never not in a situation" Fish in (Freund, 1987, p. 109). These contextual readings of fairy tales by children will be explored in this study.

## CHAPTER 3

## THE FAIRY TALE: LITERATURE FOR (?) CHILDREN

As both childhood and the literary approach for this study have been described, we now turn to the genre in which childhood and literature meet: the fairy tale. There is something timeless about the fairy tale. “The form retains a freedom and an energy that has survived the transformation of audience from rural simplicity to urban sophistication” (Hallett & Karasek, 2002, p. xxi). But why does the fairy tale continue to intrigue us? Connected to the myth, Zipes (1994) says that “myth narrates the deeds of supernatural beings, it sets examples for human beings that enable them to codify and order their lives” (p. 1). The myth, and likewise the fairy tale, can fulfill this need to order our lives through story. Harries (2002) explains how the fairy tale can bring stability to an instable world. “At a time when the world is splintering into many ethnic factions, fairy tales seem to provide some binding force” (p. 3). It is this unifying ability then, which may captivate us. Regardless of the explanation, it is clear through its sustainability, that the fairy tale has captured audiences for hundreds of years.

When utilizing the perspective of curriculum studies, in order to understand the fairy tale more fully, it is necessary to provide *context* for the tale. To provide this context, both the history and the research perspectives associated with the tale will be examined. Since the fairy tale is as old as storytelling itself, outlining its history is challenging. First, since the fairy tale predates written history, dates are hard to come by. Second, since the tales were morphed in each telling, a specific version is difficult to pin down. Finally, the fairy tale was evolving simultaneously in many parts of the world. Rather than a chronological timeline then, instead, an overview of how fairy tales have

evolved will be provided. While this overview will include histories from different countries, it will be in the manner of describing trends within the country in regards to fairy tales, as opposed to detailed time lines.

While the job of providing a thorough explanation of the history of the fairy tale is difficult, the fairy tale as the subject of research is also a daunting task. Many fields have found themselves in wonder of the fairy tale. Folklorists, anthropologists, psychologists and those in the field of both gender and political studies have all had their hands on the tale. Here also, a description of perspectives these different fields bring to the fairy tale will be provided. In order to place the fairy tale in context, and in following the path of curriculum studies, both the history and the many voices surrounding the tale will be explored here. It is important to point out that while these topics are categorized for the sake of clarity, those comfortable in the field of curriculum studies will recognize the fluidity of the boundaries of these categories.

Hallett & Karasek (2002) describe the evolution of the fairy tale as beginning and ending at two ends of a spectrum. At the front end of the spectrum lies the oral tale, which cannot be pinned down. It is in the preliterate oral tradition that the fairy tale is born. At the other end of the spectrum is the literary tale, written by a specific author in a specific time period, whose context can be identified. An explanation of this spectrum provides an outline for this chapter. First, there is the oral tale itself, of which we have no written record, but only traces in the tale types which remain today. Next, with the advent of literacy comes the transformation of the oral tales into print. While these tales do not replicate the originals, it is the intent that they do. Third, comes the creation of the literary fairy tale. Ironically, these tales are original works of authors, but cannot be

completely severed from the original folk fairy tale, as traces still remain of the plot structure of the original. On the final level is the removal of the fairy tale from the page to the medium of film, which actually *replaces* the text. Woven into these levels is the study of the field itself, including methods of categorization, interpretation, criticism, and implications for society.

### The History of the Folk/Fairy Tale

#### *Oral Roots in a Primitive World*

Folk narratives are divided into three main groups or genres: myths, legends, and folktales. What distinguishes the folktale from the myth and legend is that it is based purely on fiction, whereas the other two categories were told as fact by their creators. While folktales are fictional, they too may have been believed by some of their tellers. Folktales are “fluid by their very nature” (Ashliman), and thus resist definition. One early attempt to categorize the tales into types was made by Aarne and Thompson (1961). These types are divided into animal, ordinary, jokes and anecdotes, formula tales and unclassified tales. Under the category of ordinary folktales comes the subcategories of tales of magic (fairy tales), religious tales, novellas (romantic tales) and tales of the stupid ogre. (Aarne and Thompson in Ashliman, 2004, pp. 34-35). While this form of classification may seem obscure, they follow much research and gathering of tales in order to determine distinguishing characteristics- enough to create a tale “type.”

Simplistic but rarely reflected upon is the concept that stories were told before they were written. These first tales were the original folk tales (tales of the folk), which have evolved into the fairy tales we know today. Fairy tales fall under the category of the folk tale or folk narrative. In order to trace the origins of these oral tales, it is necessary to

return to a primitive illiterate world. What did a world before literacy look like? In the indigenous world, people shared stories, which were passed down from one generation to the next, and reflected the times in which they were told. Those living in this period were in tune with what Edmund Husserl calls the “life-world” (*Lebenswelt*), which is characterized as “our sense of the world as it is there for us before we say or do anything about it” (Smith, 1999, p. 31). This unique period of unwritten history is described by some as a time when people were more connected with nature itself. According to Abram (1996), “humans and other land animals, birds and fish, the various trees and plants, conspicuous landforms, bodies of water and weather patterns- all of whom, in that time out of time, shared a common society and spoke a common tongue” (pp. 150-151).

For those who believe this description, it seems there was little separation between humans and nature. According to Luthi (1970), elements of tales such as “fairytale” or “enchanted” were “simple reality to the primitive mind” (p. 17). It is within this atmosphere that the folk tale was born. While there is no written history, this mystical sense of the primitive world can be seen in the tales told, which have been passed down to us today. While this may sound like a tidy evolutionary linear progression, postmodernists, there were certainly many factors at play, and modern man is not superior to indigenous man. The simplified historical timeline is given only to summarize the evolution of the tale itself, as it has been told. Kincheloe (2002) questions these grand narratives, or stories we tell ourselves, saying that they “fail to understand their own construction by social and historical force” (pp. 12-13).

Today we are far removed from preliteracy. In fact, we are so consumed with literacy that Smith (1999) names this condition *hyperliteracy*, or “an exaggerated

investment in the power of literacy to the detriment of attention to how life is lived” (Smith, 1999, p. 64). In a society in which email has replaced even the detached level of phone conversation, this type of group orality as communication is foreign to us. However, since this was the only means of communication in a preliterate world, its importance during this time period cannot be underestimated. For those of us functioning within a society of hyperliteracy, *folklore* may be a difficult concept to grasp. It is first necessary then, to define folklore more specifically. Dundes (1965) has dedicated an entire chapter of this book, *The Study of Folklore* to determining a definition for folk narrative, but arrives at simply: “literature orally transmitted” (p. 24). Within the field of folklore itself, there is not a universal definition that is agreed upon (Dundes, 1965). Some definitions focus on the folk (the people themselves), while others focus on the lore (the material that has been passed to us. However, one thing all definitions have in common is the transmission of the folklore- through orality. Adding to the complexity of the definition however, is that in the preliterate tradition, *everything* was oral. It therefore must be distinguished what is folklore and what isn’t.

For cultures that did not yet practice recording anything, obviously there was no categorization of genres. It is only as the need for literacy was acquired that the need to categorize accompanied it. To go back and categorize what was not recorded is a difficult task. This may explain why genre distinctions of folk tale may seem blurred. Jones describes the tale as “spontaneous” and “ahistorical” so that its true origins could be one or many, but we will never truly know without written record. These original tales are frequently associated with myths, or nature explanation stories. These myths are often included in the same category as fairy tales. Myth and fairy tales do fall under the

category of folk tales, and they are often used interchangeably. Some of the scholars described in this chapter will use them interchangeably. Therefore, while these terms may seem to be interchanged throughout the paper when referring to these scholars, it is important to distinguish between the myth and the fairy tale.

### *The Myth v/s the Fairy Tale*

The word myth comes from the Greek *mythos*, which means “tale or story” (Georgiou, 1969, p. 216). Whether considered a subset of it, or blended with it, the myth and fairy tale are certainly connected. Like the rest of the world’s folklore, myths have come down from an obscure and distant past. “Their origins are lost, yet they reveal a freshness and a significance that transcends time itself” (Georgiou, 1969, p. 216). Because they are both characterized as dealing with extraordinary mystical powers, it may be difficult to distinguish between the myth and the fairy tale. In fact, according to Zipes (1994), we are sometimes inclined to “*collapse the distinctions* and feel compelled to return to them time and again for counsel and guidance, for hope that there is some divine order and sense to a chaotic world” [italics added] (p. 3). Jung also makes the connection between myth and fairy tale. According to Jung (1964), the universal appeal of the fairy tale is linked to what he calls the *collective unconscious*, which is what we all share, linked to the earth in a time prior to literacy. Within this collective unconscious lie archetypes, or universal themes with which we can all identify. According to Jung, these archetypes are found in dreams, myths and fairy tales. The lines then between the myth and fairy tale may seem blurred. However, there are those who can more clearly make the distinction of how the fairy tale became a by-product of the myth.

According to Eliade (1975), there was often a class distinction separating the myth from the fairy tale. The myth was associated with scientific explanations, and the fairy tale with fantasy. Therefore, those with higher levels of education were associated with the telling of myths, and those with less literate backgrounds may have become linked to the fairy tale. This breaking off of fairy tales can be seen as a breaking away from the world of the gods, associated with the nature explanations (Eliade, 1975). Tolkien (1964) has another explanation of how the tales turned from myth to fairy-story. He says that while at one time the “nature myths” were perceived as the dominant view of the people, the stories then became localized. “Epic, heroic legend, saga, then localized these stories in real places and humanized them....And finally these legends, dwindling down, became folk-tales, Marchen, fairy-stories, nursery-tales” (Tolkien, 1964, p. 23). According to this view, the fairy tale became more personal and unique to the groups in which it was told. As these tales were shared orally, a sense of community was built among its members. Both the myth and the fairy tale provided a sense of community which was linked by its orality. However, this was not to last. “The change was inevitable, for as the illiterate became literate, so did their stories” (Hallett & Karasek, 2000, p. xviii). Community was lost when the tales were moved to the written word.

In addition to a loss of community, a certain type of manipulation occurred as the tales were put on paper. There is a loss of the genuine oral tales, as they could not be written down. Ironically, this disadvantage guarantees them a certain protection as well. For as tales were written, they became susceptible to critique. According to Tismar, the written tale distinguishes itself from the oral folk tale because it is written by a single identifiable author, and “it is thus synthetic, artificial, and elaborate in comparison to the

indigenous formation of the folk tale and tends to be simple and anonymous” (Tismar in Zipes, 2000, p. xv). When a story is written, the author is likewise granted ownership. Because we hear so often of ‘Perrault’s Fairy Tales’ or ‘Grimms’ Fairy Tales,’ it’s natural to assume that these men actually wrote them, “but this isn’t the case; while all three were highly accomplished literary men, none of them were fairy-tale writers. They wrote them *down*, which is quite a different thing” (Hallett & Karasek, 2000, p. xvi). While most fairy tales can be connected to the oral tradition from which they were taken, they have been “extensively shaped and codified by successive literate tale-tellers” (Harries, 2001, p. 7). To understand this shaping and codification, it is necessary to turn to the location where this process originated- Europe.

### The Folk/Fairy Tale Moves to the Printed Page

#### *Les Contes de fées: The French Fairy Tale*

In the mid-seventeenth century, it was a popular activity for members of society to gather in “literary parlors” to share stories. These stories were eventually written, mainly by women, into collections. It was from this time period that the name of the current genre can be credited. The tales became known as the *contes de fées*, which translates to “tales of the fairies” (Zipes, 2000, p. 175). While most of the French collections are associated with women, it is Charles Perrault, who is one of the most well-known writers of the folk narrative. Perrault’s tales were mostly adapted from earlier folk tales, and were not intended for children. Instead, as the tales were shared, they were intended to entertain and amuse adults. This was known as *divertissement* (Zipes, 2002). However, the “concision of Perrault’s tales made them accessible to children” (Zipes, 2002, p. 177). Perhaps it was this quality which allows many of Perrault’s tales to be the

ones that many of today's most popular fairy tales resemble. Disney's *Cinderella* (1960) is one example of a tale adapted from Charles Perrault. "By 1720, at the very latest, the fairy tale was being institutionalized as genre, and the paradigmatic form and motifs were becoming known throughout Europe" (Zipes, 2000, p. xxii) While France can be credited with coining the phrase *fairy tale*, and producing some of the first compilations, it is later that two brothers from Germany would create a lasting name for themselves.

### *The Kings of Germany*

The works of Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm are often synonymous with the written folk-fairy tale. The tales we associate today- *Cinderella*, *Little Red Riding Hood*, *Snow White* are largely associated with the Grimm's versions. Published in 1812, their most famous work is the collection of *Nursery and Household Tales* (Tatar, 1987, p. xx). The brothers Grimm did not go out into the world to acquire their tales firsthand from storytellers, but instead relied on sources who claimed to hear the tales firsthand. Once taken second-hand, from the messengers, the translation to the written page caused another level of distortion, as societal influences were part of their writing process. The themes preserved and put forth by the brothers reflected the Romanticism of the time period. (Hallett & Karasek, 2000, p. xvii). Therefore, "in compiling the tales and revising them for publication, the scholarly brothers recreated them for their new audience-one radically different from the illiterate country folk amongst whom they originated" (Hallett & Karasek, 2000, p. xvii). In addition to the distance the Grimms created from the original folk tale they claimed to preserve, they altered their *own* tales again and again for a total of seven editions. Ironically, even with all of the copies of copies, the Grimms are still most often associated as having the rights to the "original" fairy tale. Gradually,

the Grimms wrote more with children in mind. “Ever responsive to the values of their time and increasingly sensitive to pedagogical demands, transformed adult folk materials into a hybrid form of folklore and literature for children” (Tatar, 1987, p. xx). However, it would be another twenty years before the fairy tale was fully accepted as literature for children” (Hallett & Karasek, 2000).

### *Limited Success in Italy*

While Italy has one of the earliest and richest collections of literary fairy tales (Zipes, 2000), these tales did not have the success that followed the tales of France and Germany. “Up to this day Italian folklorists, literary scholars, and writers continue to grapple with the question of how to assimilate the vast storehouse of dialect narratives of oral tradition, still in part unfamiliar to the modern reading public, into literate culture” (Zipes, 2000, p. 252). There may be several reasons for this lack of assimilation. One reason was the way in which the tales were written. Basile’s, *La Pentamerone*, was published in Neapolitan dialect “which unfortunately made it relatively inaccessible even to readers of other Italian dialects” (Dundes, 1983, p. 3). Also, “the florid style of the *Pentamerone*’s prose may not be familiar to some readers” (Dundes, 1983, p. 3). Ironically, as this dialect and prose is thought to more closely preserve the oral nature of the tale, it is the dedication to preserving the original which decreased its chances for assimilation. Although the tale was not as widely dispersed, the intention to reflect the needs of society by providing morals may be even more overt. It was the practice of these tales to put the moral at the beginning of the story, separated, so as to be clearly understood and taken with the reader. While Italy is not at the forefront for being credited for fairy tale contributions, traces of the Italian versions of many of the stories we know

today, can be found. While the slippery concepts of folklore and fairy tales have been difficult to define and trace, the creation of the literary tale is more easily grasped.

### The Literary Tale

#### *A Shift in Author and Audience*

The distinction between the folk-fairy tale and the literary fairy tale is found in both authorship and audience. The folk-fairy tale claims to have evolved from the original oral folk tale, with the author in the position of *reteller*. In contrast, the literary folk tale is the *creation* of the author. While the author may borrow from the folk tradition, a new story is created, and is instantly given an author and a definable location in history. According to Jones (2002), the literary tale does not cut itself off from the folk fairy tale however. While it may create new motifs, it still follows the basic plot outline of the folk fairy tale. Of the literary authors, he says “it is as if they have an underlying narrative backbone or outline that they follow” (Jones, 2002, p. 7). In regards to audience, the folk-fairy tale was not intended for children. In fact, while children were not excluded from the audience in the original oral form, children did lose access to these stories as they became part of adult entertainment. This may explain why so many early versions include “exhibitionism, rape, and voyeurism” (Cashdan, 1999, p. 6). However, with the creation of the literary tale, the fairy tale is placed back into the hands of the child. Therefore, the emergence of the literary tale is synonymous with the emergence of the fairy tale for children. The reasons for this simultaneous shift must be examined.

The 19<sup>th</sup> century is considered the “Golden Age” of the literary tale (Hallett & Karasek, 2000, p. 183). The literate reading public was increasing in number and the printing press made for easier distribution. It was during this time that cheap literature,

cheap books or “chap books” (Zipes, 2000) became popular and were peddled to local households that folktales underwent the editing process for children in mind. “During its long evolution, the literary fairy tale distinguished itself as genre by ‘appropriating’ many motifs, signs, and drawings from folklore...for it became gradually necessary in the modern world to adapt a certain kind of oral storytelling called the wonder tale to standards of literacy and make it acceptable for diffusion in the public sphere” (Zipes, 2000, p. xvi). It was as if the magic formula of the fairy tale had been discovered, and could now be replicated and mass produced. In the 1840s, Hans Christian Andersen, published collections of literary tales. By the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the fairy tale had become fully institutionalized in Europe and North America (Zipes, 2000). However, while the literary fairy tale for children may be surrounded with an aura of delight, there are those who see this transformation as not quite so innocent. While writing stories for children seems like a benign task, there is much more beneath the surface of the writer’s intentions for these tales.

#### *The Subversive Potential of the Literary Tale for Children*

As childhood is constructed, so too is the act of reading itself. “Our genes are programmed for spoken language. Literacy, on the other hand, is a product of *cultural conditioning*” [italics added] (Postman, 1982, p. 13). For Zipes (2000), the cultural conditioning of the fairy tale is performed specifically by the culture industry, which implants its agenda into the fairy tale, in an effort to “regulate social behaviour” (Zipes, 2000, p. 20). “Educated writers purposely appropriated the oral folk tale and converted it into a type of literary discourse about mores, values, and manners so that children would become civilized according to the social code of that time” (Zipes, 1983, p. 3).

According to Zipes, “the writers of fairy tales for children *acted* ideologically by presenting their notions regarding social conditions and conflicts, and they *interacted* with each other and with past writers and storytellers of folklore in a public sphere. This interaction led to an institutionalized symbolic discourse on the civilizing process which served as the basis for the fairy-tale genre” (p. 3). Stephens and McCallum (1998) agree, stating that “under the guise of offering children access to strange and exciting worlds removed from everyday experiences, they serve to initiate children into aspects of a social heritage, transmitting many of a culture’s central values and assumptions and a body of shared allusions and experiences” (p. 3) The oral folk tale was particularly susceptible, as it was not traceable, and was easily conformed to fit the needs of the writer. They lent themselves to being instilled with the correlating morals of society, and likewise the civilizing process for children. This civilizing process carried over to the literature that was written specifically for children, in the form of the literary fairy tale.

Maria Tatar (1992) also recognizes the intention of fairy tales once they were written *for* children. “Fairy tales have always been more about producing docile minds than playful bodies” (Tatar, 1992, p. 5). Society, according to Tatar (1992), even results to using scare tactics in order to get child readers to follow the expectations of society. “From its inception, children’s literature had in it an unusually cruel and coercive streak - one which produced books that relied on brutal intimidation to frighten children into complying with parental demands” (Tatar, 1992, p. 8). In fact, while the earliest tales may have contained violence, Tatar notes that violence was actually added once the tales were made for children. “Rather than toning down scenes of violence for children’s stories, recorders and collectors often *added* moral lessons that, in their eyes, gave them

license to emphasize or even exaggerate descriptions of punishment and death” [emphasis added] (Tatar, 1992, p. 11). Subversive, pervasive, coercive. These are not adjectives used when presenting tales to children. However, the fairy tale was an easy target for society’s manipulation.

Jack Zipes has had much to say about the *subversive potential* of the fairy tale. Interestingly, while the original stories were meant to entertain, the stories for children were meant to be *sold*. It is with this shift that an extra level of manipulation went into the making of the tale. According to Zipes (1994), the framing conditions for the fairy tale for children included: 1) the tale must teach a lesson which supported the needs of society at the time; 2) it must be short so that both children and adults could remember it; 3) it must be acceptable material; 4) it must address social issues which appeal to adults; 5) it must be suitable to be used in school; 6) must reinforce a notion of power and a way of maintaining that power. (Zipes, 1994, p. 33). It seems that a formula had been discovered to create a tale of consumption, which simultaneously perpetuated the motives of society. “The examination of children’s fiction, then, starts by stripping away the *fantasy* of child reader, or even the fantasy of ‘children of all ages,’ in order to locate and interpret the adult goals and desires that shape cultural production” (Jenkins, 1998, p. 23). It is necessary to take a closer look at the idea that these tales were *for* children.

### *Fairy Tales for Children?*

It is difficult to know the child audience, as ironically, it is the adult who is of concern in all areas. “What we produce in our retellings and rereadings discloses more about an adult agenda for children than about what children want to hear”(Tatar, 1992, p. 20). In other words, in an attempt to create something for the child, the adult has

intentions of his own. For Honeyman (2005), there is no literature genuinely *for* children. “Children’s books are not texts for children *by children* -they are books written *by adults*, chosen *by other adults* to be published and recommended/given/assigned to children *by adults*” (Honeyman, 2005, p. 9). Perhaps the best known compilers of the literary tale, and shapers of cultural production, were brothers Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm. Of their intentions, Honeyman says:

“In fully imagining the implied audience of selected Grimm tales, we have a composite construction of childhood via the Grimms or, to keep biases we know explicit, definitions of childhood according to two early-nineteenth-century, middle-class, well-educated, pro-unification, German males” (Honeyman, 2005, p. 16).

In other words, all possible perspectives of the child are through the (tainted) eyes of the adults. While there are those who believe in the manipulation of children (either by targeting them as consumers and/or instilling ideology), through fairy tales, the shift from the page to the medium of film would exceed all prior manipulation of the child.

#### Walt Disney and the Tale for Consumption

In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the fairy tale as a genre began to be institutionalized. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, it was made “appropriate” for children. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the fairy tale would become “family fare” (Zipes, 1997). While all those tellers, re-tellers, collectors and even “original” authors have had a hand on the manipulation of the fairy tale, nothing would compare to the level of manipulation that was achieved by the new media of film, which according to Zipes, “subsumed” the written word. Within this film era, Zipes (2002) contends that, even after his death, there is one man who still has a “cultural

stranglehold” on the fairy tale as we know it (Zipes, 2002). Born in 1901 to a lower middle-class family, to many, Walt Disney’s life simulated the American Dream (Zipes, 2000). While often criticized for using stereotypes, whitewashing diversity, and even making the princes of the story in his own image, his ability to transform stories to animated film was unprecedented.

The utopia provided by the fairy tale was fully realized with the release of Disney’s first feature fairy tale film, *Disney’s Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937). It should be noted that while this tale can be traced to indigenous times, and has been written in the form of many versions, it seamlessly becomes a possession of Disney himself. Walt Disney does credit Charles Perrault in the introduction of his film, Perrault’s name falls under the shadow of the much larger name of Walt Disney, preceding the title. This Disney signature would become a trademark of all “his” films. And while Disney did not significantly alter Perrault’s version of the story, of focus now is not the story but the *images* on screen, created by the marvel of animation. It is the medium of the story which now takes center stage.

While Zipes (2002) describes the devaluing of the story, which is lost in the lure of the medium of animation, I would add that the transformation from video to DVD represents the truest loss of story, resulting in only pure commodity. Not simply a DVD, but Disney DVD™. Demand is created by only “releasing” these tales for a limited time, before they are returned to the Disney Vault. Families who already own Cinderella on VHS rush to stores to be given the chance to pay for a new and improved Cinderella. They are greeted by rows of merchandise to accompany the DVD, perfectly timed at the highlight of Christmas shopping season. The *story* has not changed.

When new editions of books are written, prefaces generally include explanations of what has been added to the new edition. The equivalent of this book preface is the DVD extras. There must be something new, which would make the buyers purchase something they already own. When looking at these extras, one looks for a reason for some connection to story. Perhaps a tribute to the *original* original, Charles Perrault, the evolution of the tale, or *something* related to story. Instead, one is able to witness the remarkable skills not of the authors, but of the animators, as they digitally remaster color and sound to create a new experience. This example illustrates the loss of story. It is no longer the tale to be told, but the medium which is being sold. While the films were marketed for children, Disney includes adult references and humor, allowing adults, who want to live their lives as a fairy tale as well, to benefit from his films. It is for this reason that the fairy tale film remains a part of our culture, and our pocketbooks.

While we are all familiar with fairy tales, in this generation our knowledge has been constructed. “Walt Disney set his personal stamp upon almost every classic story for children, simultaneously determining what was to become a classic and the way in which that classic was to be read” (Zipes, 2000, p. 129). According to Zipes, “our comprehension of the folk and fairy tales remains limited and has been colored by a culture industry which has not only begotten a Walt Disney monopoly of this material but which also fogs the underlying reasons for our attraction to the tales or how they came into existence” (Zipes, 1979, pp. 26-27). Few Americans are familiar with Charles Perrault or other European writers. Zipes calls this social amnesia, and seeks to do something about it.

In spite of his criticism, Zipes does not place too much blame on Walt Disney himself. He does not claim that Disney is *intentionally* plotting to deceive the masses. Instead he says Disney is merely a product of his times, and of what the American Dream became for him. “That this image served to curtail the individual imagination and the emancipation movement of oppressed groups is a reflection of how Disney himself had become victimized and deluded by the demands of the culture industry” (Zipes, 1979, p. 129). As educators, Zipes points out that we cannot undo or change the impact of Disney. Instead, we must recognize it and use it as a starting point when aiding children to think critically. Critical thinking, as it relates to viewing the fairy tale as a product to be marketed and consumed, will be necessary for this study.

#### Welcoming Many Voices: Research Perspectives of Fairy Tales

The evolution of the fairy tale from its oral roots to its seeming manipulation provides endless possibilities for study. Interestingly, there have been relatively few research based studies conducted *on* the fairy tale. There has been instead, a multitude of *ways of looking* at the tale. These ways of looking include categorizing tale-type, discovering and appreciating the essence of the tale, interpreting symbolism of the tale for its use in psychology, looking at the biases of the tales and examining the social implications of the tale. By examining these perspectives, the context of the fairy tale is further understood. Also, the many perspectives invite future possibilities for study. No perception is excluded when examining the tale. It is these ways of looking which will now be described in more detail.

*Folklorists Explore the Structure of the Tale*

While it has been established that folklore is literature transmitted orally, the material which constitutes folklore should be studied. Dundes (1965) provides examples of that which can be considered folklore. This list ranges from literature such as myths and novellas, to riddles and even recipes. The study of this folklore is called *folkloristics*. For its connections to culture, folkloristics has been placed in the field of anthropology. (Hallett & Karasek, 2002). In fact, it is the specific connections of folklore to anthropology which is the focus of Dundes's book, *The Study of Folklore* (1965). As folklore is the telling of the stories of man, it has a direct connection to anthropology, and specifically cultural anthropology (Dundes, 1965). For anthropologists, folklore is a way of looking at man's traditions and customs. Anthropologists are also concerned with the *function* of folklore, as it relates to culture. Folklore can be used to transmit culture from one generation to another (Bascom in Dundes, 1965). While folkloristics has been practiced for some time, it was not until the 20<sup>th</sup> century, that serious attention was paid to studying the fairy tale in particular. With the publication of Andrew Lang's *Blue Fairy Book* (1926), the notion that fairy tales were valuable as a sort of window into the past, which could provide connections to past cultures, sparked interest.

Just as there are two extremes in the field of literary criticism, those which rely strictly on the text in contrast to those which rely solely on the reader, Dundes (1989), explains that there are two extremes in folklorism. The true folklorists are consumed with the identification of the tale, yet do not step outside of this task to interpret the tale. At the other extreme are the non-folklorists (pure anthropologists, psychoanalysts, literary

critics) who rely completely on interpretation without acknowledging the tale type. For Dundes, both are equally problematic:

“Identification without interpretation, as practiced by too many folklorists, is sterile- publishing collections of tales with the notes limited to enumerating the relevant tale type numbers. Interpretation without proper identification may be equally unfortunate. One might, for instance, wrongly assume that a tale had been invented by a particular author or was peculiar to one culture or historical period, where in fact the existence of earlier version of the same tale type on other cultures could easily disprove such a and unwarranted initial assumption”  
(Dundes, 1989, p. 195).

In this section, the first extreme- the folklorists themselves- will be explored. While they are criticized for their avoidance of interpretation, they provide the foundation for any research in the field of fairy tales.

Stith Thompson (1955) is associated with categorizing the motifs of fairy tales. He was influenced by the Finnish school, which focuses on the historical-geographical method (Luthi, 1970). In the name of this endeavor, “all versions, collected throughout the world from oral sources, were to be brought together, filed and analyzed, and the result would ultimately be combined into the true history of the migration of folk tales the world over” (Luthi, 1970, p. 2). While Thompson is an American, the majority of this categorization is practiced by Europeans. In fact, in general, fairy tale scholars in America are few compared to those in Europe. Utley explains that the reason this may be. He says research is “more easily practiced in a country with major folk tale archives, lifetime appointments to research institutes, and early university specialization in scholar

discipline” (Utley in Luthi, 1970, p. 4). Stated simply, the breadth and complexity of studying the tale makes it difficult to embark upon, specifically in the constraints of a semester in college. It is for this reason that alternate approaches to the tale have taken place in America. More of a focus has shifted from the history and categorization of the tale, to psychological and sociological studies. While these perspectives will be described later, European folklorists who categorized the motifs of fairy tales will now be examined.

Vladimir Propp (1968) is a Russian scholar who, while not ignoring the historical value of the tale, is concerned with the tale’s description. For Propp, “the accuracy of all further study depends upon the accuracy of classification” (Propp, 1968, p. 5). In *Morphology of the Folktale*, it is fairy tale itself which is classified. Propp defines morphology as “a description of the tale according to its component parts and the relationship of these components to each and to the whole” (Propp, 1968, p. 19). In his book, “the structure or formal organization of a folkloristic text is described following the chronological order of the linear sequence of elements in the text as reported from an informant” (Dundes in Propp, 1968, p. xi). Propp’s book is supplemented with several appendices and tables, detailing letters and numbers of corresponding tale-types. Propp’s approach to categorizing the tale is a scientific one, which he compares to the categorization of animals within the field of biology. He begins with a *function* of the tale such as “one member of a family either lacks something or desires to have something” (Propp, 1968, p. 35). Within this function comes a list of all the things there are to lack. For example, a bride, magical powers, money, etc. Each possibility is given a

corresponding letter/number combination. Propp's work serves as a reference, intended to encompass the components of all fairy tales.

While Propp focuses on the structure of the tale, French anthropologist Levi-Strauss, found value in the *content* of the tale. However, Levi-Strauss remains a structuralist, claiming that the content itself can reveal the structure. In *Myth and Meaning* (1978), Levi-Strauss explains structuralism as he sees it. For him, it is "the quest for the invariant, or for the invariant elements among superficial differences" (p. 8). In other words, he is searching for distinguishing characteristics which would allow common elements to be grouped together, in an effort so that they may be categorized. Since he was a child, Levi-Strauss describes his need to bring order where it appears to him there is disorder. His guiding inquisition is the myth. He says "mythical stories, are, or seem, arbitrary, meaningless, absurd, yet nevertheless they seem to reappear all over the world" (Levi-Strauss, 1978, pp. 11-12). Levi-Strauss focused more on the myth than the fairy tale. According to Levi-Strauss, myth is more structured, because it follows a religious belief system. The fairy tale, in contrast, contains the creativity and expression of their many tellers. However, the contribution of Levi-Strauss to fairy tale research is his flexibility within structuralism. He moves outside the text itself to make connections to society and culture. (McCurdy, 1991). It is this connection that makes him of particular interest to curriculum theorists. It is also this connection which allows Levi-Strauss to become one step closer on the spectrum to those who apply interpretive strategies when studying the fairy tale.

While Propp and Strauss are both structuralists, and therefore frequently placed in the same category, their work is in opposition to each other. Levi-Strauss, while also a

structuralist, looked at binaries, and looked at them throughout, not necessarily in sequence as did Propp. For Strauss, Propp's work is irrelevant because it is obvious. Strauss thinks the true task is getting behind the linear to discover the true structure. It should also be noted that Propp's work is of the type that can be easily replicated, while Strauss's approach is more subjective. The important distinction between the two, and specifically of value to this study, is the recognition of context within the approach. Propp relies strictly on the structure of the text alone, in isolation. Levi-Strauss however makes connections between the myth and the world- to culture. The result is that while Propp's book, *Morphology of the Folktale* (1968), led to a wealth of research on the folk tale, in and of itself is rather sterile. The work of both Propp and Levi-Strauss paved the way for other folklorists to examine the tale with more flexibility.

As a folklorist, one who has practiced this flexibility within his field is Dundes. One trend in his has been to examine several different versions of the same fairy tale. He calls these collections *casebooks*. He has written casebooks on both *Little Red Riding Hood* (1989) and *Cinderella* (1988). Dundes wishes to shed light on the oral tale which led to the literary versions of these tales. Dundes's casebooks are true reference books, as they provide the tales themselves in their entirety, sometimes, and sometimes not, accompanied by commentary by Dundes. In these books, he includes the "mainstream" versions of Perrault and Grimm, as well as less popular versions. In selecting tales which would fit under his respective titles, he is acknowledging that there is indeed a tale type, by which a story can fit under a specific category. For *Little Red Riding Hood*, he uses Aarne-Thompson's tale type 333, The Glutton (Red Riding Hood) (Dundes, 1989). At the end of the casebook, he offers a psychoanalytic interpretation of the tale itself. For

Dundes, folklorism challenges literary interpretation, which is inflexible, relying on a single text. Instead, folklorism relies on many variations.

In addition to the aforementioned criticism of the field of folklorism for not practicing interpretation, the field receives other criticisms as well. One critique is that while many folklorists claim objectivity, their work demonstrates subjectivity and even bias. Zipes (1994) gives an example of this is an example from the tale, *Rumpelstiltskin*. Zipes points out that in the tale-type collections, the focus is on the meaning of the main character's name. However, according to Zipes, this fact is irrelevant in regard to the character's essence or identity. In addition, Rumpelstiltskin is categorized as a helper (Tale type 500 "The Name of the Helper"), but is actually a "blackmailer and oppressor" (Zipes, 1994, p. 49). This example is connected to what Zipes (1994) calls the *male* bias of scholarship. While any type of categorization is susceptible to bias, the value of the tale-type collections provided by folklorists is the demonstration of distinguishing characteristics of tales over time. If nothing else, the fact that there are recurring plots and themes which withstand thousands of tale-tellers which speaks to the power and strength of the genre itself. These distinguishing characteristics comprise an *essence*.

#### *The Essence of the Tale*

In addition to the folklorists who determine tale-type, there are those who describe the characteristics inherent to the fairy tale in general. Jones (2002) attempts to distinguish between the myth, legend and fairy tale. He says according to folklore scholars, there are three major forms of folk narrative: the myth, legend and folktale. Myths use "divine mortal figures" to explain the cosmos. Legends use extraordinary characters to depict remarkable phenomena, and folktales are entertaining stories using

common people demonstrating the strengths and weaknesses of human character (Jones, 2002). Under the category of folktales are fables, which include a moral; jokes, which provide humor; novellas, which are romantic tales; and fairy tales, which are the magical tales. To further explain the distinction of the fairy tale, Jones (2002) says, “fairy tales depict magical or marvelous events or phenomena as a valid part of human experience” [italics removed] (Jones, 2002, p. 9). According to Jones, of the main characters in these stories, it is to those in fairy tales we most relate. There are those who appreciate the fairy tale “merely” for its essence. A description of these perspectives is what follows.

In *Children and their Literature*, Georgiou (1969) describes the structure of a fairy tale. She recognizes that both folk tales and fairy tales are alike. In its simplicity and lyricism, a fairy tale is not unlike other forms of folk literature- a short narrative with an uncomplicated plot. However, it is its use of “extraordinary and supernatural happenings that differentiates it from other tales of folklore” (Georgiou, 1969, p. 186). The narrator of the tale is detached from the story, and is therefore not a distraction. The reader is thrown into the story from the beginning, into a situation that is immediately described. Everything happens quickly. The reader does not have time to react, but is living the events. “Brevity is part of its charm” (Georgiou, 1969, p. 191). While Georgiou recognizes the structural elements of the tale, her attention to the aesthetic value of the tale is noteworthy. “The tales are said to have had evolved as an imaginative expression of man’s aesthetic *need*” [italics added] (Georgiou, 1969, p. 187).

### *Aesthetics*

In order to begin a journey which will eventually come full circle, it is first necessary to examine the perspective of the fairy tale as an art form to be enjoyed, as

opposed to a mystery to be solved. Luthi is more concerned with the aesthetic nature of the fairy tale. Rather than the focusing on the details themselves, fairy tales in general focus on man's upward struggle. For Luthi, even if children cannot fully understand this, they can "sense it." "The fairy tale is a poetic vision of man and his relationship to the world, a vision that for centuries inspired the fairy tale's hearers with strength and confidence because they sense the fundamental truth of this vision" (Luthi in Hallett & Karasek, 2002, p. 373). This statement from Luthi underscores the idea that there is a feel to fairy tales that in their essence communicate a sense of almost magic, without being completely visible. Luthi (1970) recognizes the style of fairy tales as offering clarity and precision through its limited use of detail. Characters are not complex but clearly good or evil.

In *Fairytales as Art Form and Portrait of Man* (1984), Luthi examines the fairy tale from two perspectives: aesthetics and anthropology. Luthi sees the fairy tale as art form, reflecting the life of man- "the artistry of the genre and its anthropological message" (Luthi, 1984, p. xi). However, he is not concerned in the "performance" or function of the tale, but by the tale itself. He is interested in the narrative itself. For Luthi, the tale is told because it evokes pleasure in its telling, and herein lays its value. However, Luthi does acknowledge that all literature is a way of looking at the world, and specifically a way of looking at mankind. And it is in this book which he intends to demonstrate how this is done. Luthi looks mainly at those tales associated with beauty- the magical tales of Europe. Interestingly, while Luthi makes use of the categorizations of narrative by those such as Propp (1968), he says he will only briefly mention those characteristics of the tale which are obvious to the reader. He instead will focus on those

artistic qualities which are not obvious at first. There is another group who appreciates the fairy tale as art form.

### *Storytellers*

While our society may be accused of being hyperliterate, we should not be too hard on ourselves. For the conditions in which storytelling lend itself, do not exist today. We use our oral communication for other purposes. There are those who tap into the power of oral storytelling. In contrast to those who wish to pick the tale apart, storytellers wish to grasp the essence of the story itself. In an effort to look at fairy tales for storytelling, Marcia Lane (1993) set out to understand the tale. In her book, *Picturing the Rose*, Lane (1993) seeks to simplify some of the scientific approaches to the fairy tale, while also providing her own perspective to reading the tale. Lane comes to the realization that before there were critics, there was only the story and the storyteller. Lane (1993) settles at the realization of fairy tales as “accumulated experiences.” It is with this realization that the fairy tale opens doors to many other aspects of life itself. On using the analogy of the rose, which is always the same, and always changing, Lane (1993) says of the fairy tale: “These stories will blossom as you examine them; you can look and look, and they will never lose their ability to delight and enchant” (p. xiv). It is this acknowledgement of an essence, specifically for children who are likely to first appreciate the tale at face value, which can be valuable to this study.

### *Psychoanalytic Perspectives*

#### *The Archetype as a Link to the Unconscious*

It is difficult to contest the emotional connection the fairy tale can create. For this reason, a science dealing with emotions has a large part to play in fairy tale research.

Psychoanalysts work with emotions, and specifically selves seeking wholeness. A more scientific explanation may be that psychoanalysis is a search for finding harmony between the two parts of the psyche. Sometimes referred to as the father of psychology, Freud's focus of seeking wholeness involves dealing with conflict within the individual, frequently traced back to the Oedipal complex. A student of Freud, Jung (1964) defines the search for wholeness as individuation, which he calls "the conscious coming-to-terms with one's own inner center (psychic nucleus) or Self" (p. 166). While Freud is connected to science, Jung has been credited with exposing Freud to the arts, including myth. Freud, however, was suspicious of the conscious reporting of anything (Storr, 1989). Therefore, he was not impressed by literature. He even warns against the literary nature of the dream that has been retold as it "can do no more than condense, displace, represent in plastic form and subject the whole to a secondary revision" (Freud in Bollas, 1987, p. 69). While Freud and Jung had differing perspectives, they shared the value of dreams in psychoanalysis. And it is the dream, which provides the connection between fairy tales and psychoanalysis.

While both Freud and Jung believed in the dream as a link to the unconscious, it is Jung who makes the connection between dream and myth. For Jungians, the connection of fairy tales to dreams is linked through the unconscious: "As products of the unconscious, dreams tell us what is in the background of our conscious lives; so fairy tales, as products of the creative fantasy, tell us about the various possible developments of our individual lives" (McCurdy, 1991, p. 1). Jung believed in a *collective unconscious* which unifies us all. This collective unconscious is characterized by recurring archetypes. These archetypes can be accessed through a person's dreams, and also within the myth

itself. According to Jung, this collective unconscious was born in the preliterate world. While our access to dreams takes place in the unconscious, the myth displays archetypes which can be accessed consciously. By interpreting these archetypes, man can unlock the keys to his unconscious, and likewise find balance. The Jungians, therefore, believe in the power of psychoanalysis, as it is accessed through archetypes.

There are others in the field that have made connections between fairy tales and dreams. According to von Franz, “A fairy tale is an unconscious product of the imagination, just like a dream” (von Franz in Birkhauser-Oeri, 1988, p. 9). Campbell (1949) says fairy tales are “spontaneous productions of the psyche” (p. 4). Echoing the belief in the collective unconscious which connects dreams and fairy tales, Eric Fromm describes a universal language as well. According to Eric Fromm, there is a universal language that we all share. It is this symbolic, *Forgotten Language* (1951) that Fromm describes in his book:

“It is the one universal language the human race has ever developed, the same for all cultures and throughout history. It is a language with its own grammar and syntax, as it were, a language one must understand if one is to understand the meaning of myths, fairy tales and dreams.” (p. 7)

This language, according to Fromm, does not follow the same rules of logic as does the language we use during our waking hours. And according to Fromm’s description, the only qualification for having access to this language is membership to the human race.

A follower of Jung, Marie von Franz found a void in the research of the interpretation of fairy tales. Her response was a series of lectures on the topic. Her goal was to “open up the archetypal dimension of the fairy tales to students” (von Franz, 1996,

p. vii). According to von Franz (1996), fairy tales provide a unique portrait of the archetype because as opposed to the hero types in myths, which are supposed to be real, the heroes in fairy tales are abstractions. This relates directly to the archetype. She says “fairy tales are the purest and simplest expression of collective unconscious psychic processes. Therefore, their value for the scientific investigation of the unconscious exceeds that of all other material” (von Franz, 1996, p. 1). The fairy tale shows a purer illustration of the archetype as the hero stories fall under layers of culture, but there is less “conscious” cultural material to get in the way. The archetype can be studied in its purest form. Archetypes represent a piece and the whole of collective unconscious simultaneously.

One proof of a collective unconscious comes from, following the Grimms, the almost simultaneous (von Franz refers to it as “mushroom growth”) of fairy tale collections around the world. It is not the collections themselves which account for the proof of the collective unconscious, but the recurring motifs within them. How could this be explained if not by some ancient connection? While at the time, an idea of a collective unconscious or psyche did not exist, researchers set out to trace the path of the tales and their respective origins. This included the work of the aforementioned Arne and Propp who collected motifs, but did not attempt to explain their origin. Von Franz (1996) recounts that it was actually Ludwig Laistner who made a connection to fairy tale motifs and dreams. “It is a typical mode of primitive behavior that dream experience is regarded as actual and real experience” (von Franz, 1996, p. 7). It is this foundation which led to the formulation of a collective psyche. The Jungians are unique in that they connect an

emotional experience to the archetype. It is this emotional experience which is analyzed in both adults and children alike.

*The Fairy Tale and Analysis for Children*

In *The Uses of Enchantment* (1975), Bettelheim looks to fairy tales to assist children with the fears associated with growing up. By working through the problems of the characters in the tale, the child can do the “work” and be able to transfer the problem solving skills to the fears of his own life. According to Bettelheim, the search for meaning in life is perhaps “our greatest need and most difficult achievement” (p. 3). As parents seeking to help their children find meaning, the task can be even more challenging. As a therapist working with children, Bettelheim felt a more significant purpose for supplying meaning for children. For if the children having difficulties could have meaning restored to their lives, they would be cured on some level. The dissemination of “cultural heritage” is perhaps the best supplier of meaning for children. For Bettelheim, the best way to disseminate this knowledge was through literature. Not just any literature would achieve this goal:

“For a story truly to hold the child’s attention, it must entertain him and arouse his curiosity. But to enrich his life, it must stimulate his imagination; help him to develop his intellect and to clarify his emotions; be intoned to his anxieties and aspirations; give full recognition to his difficulties, while at the same time suggesting solutions to problems which perturb him.” (Bettelheim, 1975, p. 5)

For Bettelheim, the literature for children which could achieve this was the folk fairy tale. From these stories, children can learn the inner problems of human beings.

Bettelheim explains how fairy tales work in the field of psychoanalysis. He says fairy tales have a direct link to the field because they “carry important messages to the conscious, the preconscious, and the unconscious mind, on whatever level each is functioning at the time” (Bettelheim, 1975, p. 6). In order for people to grow up and function, we must be able to understand the interaction of our conscious and our unconscious. The difficulty with this is that our unconscious mind cannot be understood at a rational level. The fairy tale offers imaginative possibilities, and alternate worlds, in which the child can become familiar with his unconscious. At the same time, however, the story is connected to reality, and so the two take place together. It is this playing out of the unconscious which allows the child to become better able to cope with issues. Children have their own fears, and parents tend to gloss over them in an effort to make light and hope they will go away. Fairy tales deal with these fears directly.

While it is the nature of society to shelter children from problems, this will not benefit them in the long run. They need the opportunity to practice problem solving so they will be ready to deal with adversity. The fairy tale confronts the child with problems. There are dying family members, difficult tasks, etc. In addition, the fairy tale provides a simplistic and straightforward perspective of a situation. There is clear good and evil, a defined problem, and all situations in general are simplified. It is with this clarity that a child can relate to the fairy tale. Further, fairy tales are appealing to children of all ages, gender and sex, as they deal with changes in identification as the child deals with his own problems. This is another reason why the fairy tale can have a unique value when it is read at another time in a child’s life. While not with the intent to psychoanalyze the child, it is these qualities of the tale which will provide value to the study.

While linked to psychoanalysis himself, Dundes claims that those who study the fairy tale for interpretation, rely too much on one canon, and specifically the Grimm canon. He targets psychoanalysts (including Bettelheim, Roheim and even Freud and Jung) in particular as relying too heavily on the Grimm canon. He goes as far as to say “nearly every psychoanalytic reading of fairytales uses the Grimm version as the sole point of interpretive departure” (Dundes, 1989, p. 197). As it has already been discussed, while Grimms’ tales may be some of the closest to the original, this would only be if they were put on a timeline. The Grimms received their tales from collectors, and made many adaptations, revisions, and compiling to create their own modified tales. While this is done admittedly by many collectors and authors of fairy tales, the particular problem with the Grimms is that they claim to hold the original. Dundes (1989) refers to the result as “fakelore.” Dundes analyzes the psychoanalytic interpretation, but does not conclude without offering his own generalized interpretation that tales can be traced to their type. Dundes does provide context by exposing the dangers of the identification/interpretation extremes.

Cashdan (1999) sets out to see what it is about the fairy tale that appeals to us, and its impact on our lives. Like Bettelheim, he addresses the psychological impact of the tale on children. In his analysis, Cashdan points out several myths associated with fairy tales, including that they were written *for* children, that they were written by the brothers Grimm, and that they teach lessons. Cashdan takes each of these myths in turn, and exposes the reality of the making of tales. In addition to exploring the history of the tale, Cashdan looks at familiar tales to find “hidden” meanings he says could have been lost to

us in our youth. Finally, for the value they contain, Cashdan introduces tales that did not make into the mainstream canon.

For his similarities to Bettelheim in selecting tales, interpreting their meanings, and telling how they psychologically impact children, Cashdan is exposing himself to the same criticisms as Bettelheim. The selection of the tales themselves, and the hidden meanings Cashdan derives from there are certainly subjected to Cashdan's opinion and motives. Cashdan (1999) echoes Bettelheim when he says "whereas the initial attraction of a fairy tale may lie in its ability to enchant and entertain, its lasting value lies in its power to help children deal with the internal conflicts they face in the course of growing up" (Cashdan, 1999, p. 10). However, Cashdan distinguishes himself from Bettelheim, and Freud for that matter in their focus for psychoanalysis. While they see connections to sexuality, Cashdan does not believe this is what children spend their time worrying about. Cashdan offers a "psychological perspective" as opposed to a "psychoanalytic" point of view. He talks about "self theory" which focuses on "aspects of the personality that threaten to undermine a child's intimate connection to others, particularly parents and peers" (Cashdan, 1999, p. 12). He points out that fairy tales contain weaknesses of selves there is some sin involved.

While children will value more from exploration of fairy tales, as opposed to explanation to adults, Cashdan does feel that pointing out the sin in the story will benefit the child. As the child can play out the conflict of the characters in the story, he can utilize these skills when dealing with his own conflicts of self. This acting out, according to Cashdan, may liken the experience with fairy tales to "psychodrama" which "blends theatrical concepts with psychotherapeutic principles" (Cashdan, 1999, p. 16). While this

practice sounds similar to Bettelheim, Cashdan seems to take more of a hands-off approach. He is not trying to cure the child. Cashdan's book actually focuses on our mortal sins: vanity, gluttony, envy, deceit, lust, greed, sloth and gives examples of fairy tales containing the sins. Cashdan (1999) is also drawn to the 20<sup>th</sup> century tale *The Wizard of Oz*, and dedicates an entire chapter to it. According to Cashdan, it addresses three universal themes of the wish: to be intelligent, to have feelings, and to be brave. He feels these concepts shape the lives of everyone from childhood to adults.

While intended to help children in the process of growing up, the psychological approach has been subjected to criticism. Utley (in Luthi, 1970) claims that in the method is often practiced "in a mechanical manner without paying much attention to the significance of the individual teller" (pp. 4-5). At first glance, Bettelheim's rationales sound convincing. However, he is the subject of much criticism, specifically for the biases he is said to demonstrate. By manipulating the selection of the stories he analyzes in an effort to make them more friendly/useful to the field of psychology (Tatar, 1992). He also is accused of selecting stories where women have a guilty, seductive role (Tatar, 1992). Others in the field of literary criticism have attempted to utilize the archetype, but grant it a scientific quality. Regardless of opinion of psychoanalysis and fairy tales, its contribution to the field of fairy tales cannot be overlooked. While psychoanalysts are concerned with the shaping of a person, there are those who take a more political view of the fairy tale.

## Fairy Tale and Society

### *Gender Studies: The Influence of the Tale on Society*

For those scholars who examine the fairy tale and society, the influence of the society both on and by the fairy tale is of interest. Those in this category may also be classified as postmodern, as they go beyond the face value of the tales to reveal hidden motives, as well as discuss future possibilities. For those involved in gender studies, research looks at the influence of the tale on society. While the stories are largely dominated by women, it is the role of the woman which becomes the focus for those in gender studies. The stereotyping of women within fairy tales may seem obvious. Interestingly, there can be two opposing perspectives. The first would suggest that women are shown to be the weakest character, depending on men to come to her rescue. In contrast, the women of many of these same fairy tales can be seen as heroes, overcoming their adverse situations to find their own happy endings. In this case, the women would be the stronger characters. Regardless of one's position on the role or non-role of gender stereotyping in fairy tales, the role of gender itself cannot be ignored. These issues are examined by feminist scholars.

Stereotypical images of women have been a point of contention for feminist scholars, particularly those in the field of literary criticism. The fairy tales from Walt Disney represent the *happily ever after* of the modern literary tale. In the well-known princess stories (*Snow White*, *Cinderella*, *Sleeping Beauty*), happiness will be found when the female character is rescued by Prince Charming, and they of course get married. This theme, among others, is dispelled by postmodern feminists. "As women have struggled to assert their position in the social and political worlds, some have identified the fairy tale

as an early contributor to sexual inequality” (Hallett, & Karasek, 2000, p. 277).

According to Warner (1994), “the happy endings of fairy tales are only the beginning of the larger story” (p. xxv). In other words for feminist scholars, life is more complex than the simplistic version of these tales.

Kay Stone recognizes the powerful positions taken on gender by those related to various critical perspectives. Stone, however wants to give the reader a voice on these issues. In *The Misuses of Enchantment* (1985), she does just that. Stone interviews both adults and children, male and female to find their reaction to fairy tales. Stone’s basic question of: “Do you remember anything about fairy tales, and have they affected you in any way?” (Stone, 1985) would provide an interesting starting point to learn more about the background of the students in my study. While the majority of her responses came from females, she attributes this to the small number of male interviewees who could recollect any details on any fairy tale either read or heard. Even one male student who claimed he did not know any fairy tales was corrected by his mother who claimed he had just heard one the night before. This resulted in an interesting observation that males may connect fairy tales as “girl” stories, and thus not for them. This will be an interesting perspective to keep in mind as I conduct my own study. While Stone uncovered that there are certainly no uniform answer to personal experiences with fairy tales, she found that gender played a significant part in the responses she was given.

Harries (2002) examines the biases towards women in the form of omission. Harries wishes to focus on a collection of writings that have been widely overlooked; the women writers in France. While they are credited with the origin of the name for the tale, their contributions from a country that predated the brothers Grimm in the telling of the

tale has certainly great influence. However, the names we most frequently associate with popular fairy tales are those by men: Perrault, Grimm, Lang, Andersen and Wilde. As women in France were actually the founders of the genre, the bulk of the stories were written by women. Harries explains the genre as unfolding in two different styles. There was the “compact” fairy tales which claim to be as close to the original as possible. These were the collected tales of Perrault. Then there were the “complex” tales which seek to tell the stories behind the stories (p. 17). The women writers wrote more complex tales, experimenting with elements of plot and recreating the originals. Harries seeks to find out why the shorter version won out. Harries wishes to “reread the shifting history of that language and the different, gendered ways it has been spoken over the last three hundred year” (Harries, 2002, p. 18). Women were excluded because of literary access, but even when they gained access, their work was excluded. Women wrote for adults, and were more tales about tales. We are limited to the constraints of the genre as it has been given to us.

*Societal Manipulations: The Influence of Society on the Tale*

“The work of literature is said to be the reflection or example of social, historical, and ideological forces at a given time and place” (Miller, 1987, p. 8). This section will examine the influence of society on the tale. Consequently, those who are affected by the tale after it has been manipulated will be studied. In this case, those are specifically children. “The fairy tale is shaped by literary traditions with different social uses and users” (Bacchilega, 1997, p. 3). According to Jones (2002), those fairy tale scholars examining the tale from a sociohistorical perspective “have shown how fairy tales operate as cultural primers and mirrors” (p. xiii). According to Tatar (1992), the appreciation of

fairy tales is constructed by adults. It is by the reading of them to children in which they influence the mind of the listener. The child becomes trained at what is funny, scary and delightful. “The places where we wince, cower, laugh, comment, whisper, shriek or engage in any of the other numerous activities that mark the sites of our rewriting of a text determine the way the child perceives the story” (Tatar, 1992, p. xxi). Getting at the meaning of stories is an important objective when studying literature. Especially for children’s stories, we read with the expectation of receiving a moral or lesson.

In any study of fairy tales, the name Jack Zipes will undoubtedly surface. Zipes’s fascination with the fairy tale is tied to society’s implication in their formation. In *Breaking the Magic Spell* (1979), Zipes states his mission: “Clearly all folk tales take their departure from a point in history which it is necessary to relocate if we are to grasp their unusual power in the present and their unique influence at all levels of culture and art” (p. 9). Zipes acknowledges folk and fairy tales as products of the imagination, but claims the literary fairy tale is a product devised for consumption. It has been manipulated by the culture industry who wishes to profit as well as instill ideologies. At first glance, the invention of mass media should result in greater communication and sharing of ideas with a larger group of people. However, in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the group of people able to read was members of the bourgeois. This automatically excluded the group who were sharing the tales to begin with. It was at this critical turning point that the audience of the tale changed, and with it, the motives of the tale as well.

Zipes focuses on the fairy tale as institution. For him, the fairy tale is “frozen myth.” In contrast to Jung and others who feel the myth contains a universality which is linked to a collective unconscious, Zipes also believes in the universality of the

myth/fairy tale. However, Zipes, attributes this universality to its social construction at the point of it becoming an institution. This took place in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, by mostly women French writers. He explains this more completely:

“Literary fairy tales are socially symbolical acts and narrative strategies formed to take part in civilized discourses about morality and behavior in particular societies and cultures. They are constantly rearranged and transformed to suit changes in tastes and values, and they assume mythic proportions when they are frozen in an ideological constellation that makes it seem that there are universal absolutes that are divine and should not be changed” (Zipes, 1994, p. 19).

In other words, society manipulates the tale to suit its needs, while all the while selling it as a constant in our lives, to connect us to our childhood. Like Fish (1980), Zipes acknowledges that there are external forces in culture which shape, or “frame” our decisions.

While Fish is referring to the interpretation of what we read, Zipes is referring to the production of literature. He calls this shaping or framing the “institution of art” (1994). This process is seen in the birth of the literary tale in French salons. As women gathered, these tales began being told as a form of entertainment. However this was done in the manner of a game, in which certain rules were followed. This arose “out of a need by aristocratic women to elaborate and conceive other alternatives in society than those prescribed for them by men” (p. 23). The women followed certain expectations in their tellings. As the tales were meant to sound natural, they did borrow from known folk tales, and improvise to adapt them to fit the requirements of the time period including social

manners. However, these stories were still not available to all children, but only to those whose parents were wealthy.

Tatar also speaks of Fish's (1980) interpretive community. Within interpretive communities, we are tied to universal truths or expectations that we have learned. Tatar speaks of the docile child. Like Foucault's docile body (1975), susceptible to molding by society, the child becomes a blank slate in need of civilizing. The political perspective of Tatar is seen when she interprets the "well-adjusted" child as the "socialized and productive child" (Tatar, 1992, p. xvii). In other words, while seemingly well-intended, the moralizing aspect of children's literature is actually just a way to get students to conform to society's expectations. When reading, we attempt to conform to our interpretations to match these societal demands. "Ambiguities, disruptive moments, contradictions, gaps are suppressed in favor of the construction of a concise, self-evident, universal truth- 'the real meaning of the tale'" (Tatar, 1992, p. xvi). It is these ambiguities and disruptive moments which will be sought out in this study.

According to Zipes, while we need the tales, we also need a standard for our lives. It is not unusual for him that we do not acknowledge the history of the tales. He says "we classify and categorize to establish types and values. We weed out, modify and purify, seeking the classical statement or form" (Zipes, 1994, p. 5). The tale of the classic fairy tale is familiar to us, and we are comforted by it. The appearance that we "are all part of a universal community with shared values and norms, that we are all striving for the same happiness" (p. 5). It is for this reason that we cling to the "classics" and reject any tales which do not conform to these requirements. Zipes feels that all of our myths today are adjusted to fit our modern needs. He shares Barthes's belief that "a myth is a collective

representation that is socially determined and then inverted so as not to appear as a cultural artifact” (p. 6).

While Zipes speaks of fairy tale as institution with many motivations behind its molders, it should be recognized as having a coercive streak. However, Zipes does offer a glimmer of hope. According to Zipes, “although a text may contain directives within it, it cannot prescribe its effect” (p. 141). He also says that “meaning shifts with the individual in history” (p. 141). These observations offer support to this study. First, it is important to be aware of the manipulation of the fairy tale for the purposes of maintaining the expectations of society. In addition, the manipulators wish to be anonymous and intend that the fairy tale will retain its classical “look” and appear to be the original work. After an awareness of this, it is possible to look at the fairy tale any way you like. Readers need not be contaminated, especially when armed with awareness. Zipes also maintains the influence of historical location (i.e. interpretive community) on the reader as meaning-maker. In addition to being a comprehensive resource on the history of the fairy tale itself, Zipes sees beyond a timeline of events, but the implications of what was happening behind the scenes.

While Zipes recognizes that the fairy tale has been manipulated to influence children and adults, he also notes that it has been altered in some ways to offer a message of hope to children who read it. However, for Zipes, the question is “how the culture industry compromises our notion of the pursuit of happiness gleaned from fairy tales” (Zipes, 1997, p. 6). Zipes (1997) is also aware of the claim that a culture industry can be manipulated by its members for their benefit. While Zipes sees this as a possibility, for children who are influenced at such a young age, the culture industry becomes the

standard. It is this danger which can rob them of the critical skills for interpretation. Zipes finds it curious that children are rarely included in studies of popular culture. “Their” literature is not integrating with that of adults at the university level. However, Zipes does not see how what impacts the child can’t influence the adult. Zipes wishes to explore this area. Specifically, it is important for him to “grasp when and why children became the focus of fairy tale writers and filmmakers and what role the fairy tale plays as literature, film, audiocassette, and electronic story in the lives of both children and adults” (pp. 8-9). For Zipes, it is the rigid structure of the expectations that culture has predetermined that is filtered to children through the western fairy tale cannon, with the easiest access being through movies and likewise television. He would like to see their resources expand.

The approach of interpretive communities values the position of the reader, as he is located in the context of the society which holds him. While reading involves interpretation, the story itself, and the experience of reading it in its purest form will be the attempt. There will always be the influence of the external factors within the interpretive community. However, by exposing them, they lose some of their coercive nature. This study is not about getting caught up in the minutiae of interpreting the meaning of a fairy tale. Even if this were the goal, the overwhelming task of determining which tales and why would convolute the study. The findings of those who have come before certainly provide relevance and context to the fairy tale itself. However, what is absent in the research is at the heart of this study- the voice of the child.

A brief history of fairy tales has been given. Those who study the tales have been summarized. It is worth noting that of all the perspectives of researchers; none has been

described who looks at the tale solely from the child's point of view, without any preconceived outcome or goal.

“With few notable exceptions, nearly every study of children's fairy tales published in this century has taken the part of the parent, constructing the true meaning of tales by using the reading strategies of an adult bent on identifying timeless moral truths, fold wisdom of the ages, and universally valid developmental paradigms of boys and girls.” (Tatar, 1992, p. xvii)

This is why this study is unique. The external influences of the tale include the interpretive communities of the author and the researcher as well. Again, with exposure, they will be woven into the experience.

“No text opens itself immediately to everyone” (Derrida, 1992, p. 177). In revisiting these tales, I have discovered how little of the details I had forgotten about the different versions. The transcendence into another space and time has a clear and definite beginning and ending. We are given permission to suspend the rules of logic which govern every day activity. Nonsensical talking frogs and granted wishes do not make us think twice. However, there is much to be learned about the human condition, and about life's themes, as well as literature in general.

## CHAPTER 4

## FAIRY TALE DISCOURSE IN ONE INTERPRETIVE COMMUNITY

As discussed in chapter one, within the field of curriculum studies, the humanities play a special role. “The reconceptualized field is a rare area in the broader field of education in which the humanities and the arts, if we cannot say have triumphed, certainly have come to occupy a good deal of conceptual and methodological territory” (Pinar et. al, pp. 50-51). For this specific study, which deals with the reading of literature, literary criticism is the area of humanities which provides an approach. This selected approach of interpretive communities, like curriculum studies, recognizes the many factors influencing the interpretive process. That literature which will be given to the students in this study is fairy tales. For the genre’s association with children, as well as its unique evolution, the fairy tale is the genre which has been selected for this study. Where curriculum theory, an approach from literary criticism and the reading of fairy tales intersect will be examined in this study.

Curriculum theorists would promote the voice of the child, and the relevance of the teaching in literature in the life of the student. Unfortunately, this seems to be rarely the case. “Words are not tools, but we give children language, pens, and notebooks as we give workers shovels and pickaxes” (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, p. 76). Rather than provide students with a genuine literature experience, or allow them to create their own meanings, literature is rather picked apart, with the teacher’s interpretation of the author’s intended meaning becoming the prize which the students must earn. It is this gap between the ideal and the actual which creates a space for this study to occur. “Is it any wonder that this *trained incapacity* to be fully engaged alienate[s] students from reading

literature?” [italics added] (Clifford, 1991, p. 4). The attempt to *untrain* students will be the goal of this study.

Within this chapter, the study itself will be described, along with a review of the methodology that has been selected. In order to describe the conditions in which the study takes place, a profile of the school and student research group will be given, along with background information on these students as obtained through individual interviews. In order to form a comparison between the small group discussion groups and the traditional literature instruction of the students' classroom, an observation of a large group lesson will be described. Finally, the remainder of the chapter will consist of a brief summary of each fairy tale, followed by an overview of the discussion which follows the reading. Following the last discussion group, students were given evaluations to complete to assess their opinions on our project. These findings will also be shared. Once the results of the study have been described, connections can begin to be made in attempt to answer the guiding question of the study: ***In the elementary classroom, how does the unencumbered experience of reading fairy tales create a new discourse which can allow the voice of the child to be heard in the classroom?***

#### The Study: The Unencumbered Experience of Reading Fairy Tales

Marshall, et al. (1996), has conducted a study examining students reading literature in a variety of contexts. For its connection to this study, it will serve as a type of spring board. Connections will then be made to this study as its description will follow. Finally, the methodology of interpretive communities will be revisited to provide perspective for this study, as well as situate it within the field of curriculum studies.

*A Similar Study: Large Group Verses Small Group Literature Discussions*

Marshall, et al., (1996) is driven by the current condition of the teaching of literature. He cites a classroom example in which adolescents are bored discussing a novel they have read. Some students think it is draining to pick the book apart page by page. Others think the book itself is boring, and is made worse by going over it tediously. Marshall seeks to determine why, if this traditional method of teaching literature is not effective for students, teachers continue to practice it? In order to look at other ways to approach the teaching of literature, Marshall explores the ways in which people discuss literature in a variety of contexts. He devises a quantitative coding system for analyzing discussion (breaking units of speech into communicative and turns units). It is Marshall's hope that by analyzing his findings, he can determine which method is the most effective for instruction. While Marshall is primarily concerned with the results which will take place within the school, he is also interested in the way adults discuss literature as well.

Marshall looks at a variety of literature discussion groups including large groups, small groups, and even literature groups outside of the classroom. The large group discussion gives a look at the most authoritarian voice of the teacher. The smaller groups did allow more discussion on the part of the students, but the students still mimicked the classroom talk to which they were accustomed. Interestingly, Marshall found that the personality and teaching style of the teacher may have some affect on the discussion styles of the teacher. He also could not determine for sure whether or not classes who were used to small discussion groups could have had an advantage to discussing more freely. While I too will compare large and small group discussions, it will not be an

attempt to favor one over the other, but to provide a safe and experimental atmosphere in which a new type of discourse is practiced.

The value of Marshall's study is that it calls attention to the types of discussion that students have within the classroom versus outside. In order for teachers to reform their discussion groups to value the voice of the student, new roles have to be taken on by both teacher and student. One suggestion that is made is that teachers focus on *strategies* students use while reading, rather than the interpretations themselves. This may reduce the pressure that both teacher and student feel for getting at the right answers. By focusing on strategies, the teacher's primary role is to "encourage students to explain how they have gone about their journey, rather than to make certain that everyone has arrived at the same destination" (p. 134). Marshall does not claim to have found a magic fix for classroom discussion, and likewise the teaching of literature. He does say this:

"A major benefit of the activities that we have described is that they do not cue the *conventional language of interpretation and response*. Instead, they place a much greater emphasis on student's knowledge and experience, on what they live through as they read, and on how they talk about their response after reading"  
[italics added] (p. 134).

It is the attempt to undo the conventional language of interpretation and response that this study will also follow. Marshall points out that while talking about literature helps us learn about literature, it also helps us to learn more about the talking itself. The discussions themselves create a "*mode of literary knowledge*" (p. 2) which, according to Marshall, we know very little. This study will attempt to learn more about this mode of literary knowledge, this novel discourse.

*The Fairy Tale Study*

After the research group has been chosen, each student will be required to read one fairy tale each week. I will then meet with the group twice each week to discuss the story they have read. No written assignments will be given in connection with the readings. In addition, it is the intention that the teacher will have little involvement in guiding the students through the discussion process. These guidelines have been created in an effort to provide the students an experience of reading literature unlike what they have been given. In addition, the genre of literature will provide an added element of the discussion being truly given to the students. There are no predetermined interpretations or expectations of what the students will *get* from the stories. While Marshall's study uses a detailed system of coding dialogue, this study will look at patterns of discussion to determine the trend in the nature of the discussions as a whole. Rather, the nature of the discussion itself is intended to remove the teacher from the position of disseminator of knowledge, and allow for a true experience of reading fairy tales. This new framework for literature discussion groups is intended to create a new type of discourse, which will alter the traditional roles of teachers and students.

Before beginning the study, the selection of a fairy tale collection was necessary. This was not an easy task. For Miller (1987), the selection of novels for students by teachers "loads the dice" (p. 11), or creates bias by the teacher. "Does not the order of examples, whatever I say, magically generate a narrative and seem to tell a story with beginning, middle, and end, a logic and teleology of its own?" (Miller, 1987, p. 11). I did not want the selection of books to reflect more about me and my opinions toward fairy tales than what could be learned from the students. Nonetheless, a collection had to be

chosen, and I selected the following criteria: First, the stories should be short enough to be read in one sitting. At the same time, stories should not be too juvenile for these bright fifth graders. Traditional and recognizable stories would allow recognition and nostalgia of fairy tales which adds to their appeal, and likewise relevance to this study. Finally, I wanted to find stories that were similar in form so that the genre was noticeable. I was able to find all of these elements within *Princess Fairy Tales* (2007). The stories included in the collection are *Rapunzel*, *The Frog Prince*, *The Snow Queen*, *Cinderella* and *The Princess and the Pea*. Each story within the collection was credited to a different author, including the brothers Grimm, Charles Perrault and Hans Christian Andersen. These familiar authors and stories reflect tales retold, as well as original literary fairy tales.

#### *A Return to Methodology*

Before the study begins, it is necessary to return to the methodology which will be selected. Stanley Fish's (1980) *interpretive community* provides a framework friendly to a study in curriculum studies. Located within reader response criticism, Fish values the meaning produced by the reader, while still honoring the text. Further, Fish recognizes that there the reader is situated within a variety of contexts which affect the interpretation process. Lane (1993) says "even if the teller and the listener are of the same cultural group (so they start with the same understanding of implied meanings), the differences in personal experience guarantee that each listener will form particular-and sometimes radically dissimilar- images from the tellers' words" (p. 9). While the members of this study come from similar interpretive communities, they each have unique backgrounds which influence their ideas on what they read-in this case the fairy tale.

As my participation would become an additional influence within the interpretive community, I reflected upon what my role would be in the discussion groups. My position at the school is that of gifted *facilitator*. With this title comes an emphasis on what a student can produce when provided with an environment which fosters creativity, as well as individual and cooperative group projects. As a facilitator, as opposed to disseminator, I felt I was already one step in the right direction. I planned to carry this role of facilitator over to the discussion groups. My goal would be to see what the students could come up with after reading these fairy tales. It would not be my role to *give* the students information, or even guide them towards a predetermined set of assessments I had made about the story. This latter goal would provide more of a challenge. Richard Poirier (1992) describes a novel idea for a literary interpretation college level class he teaches in which students were asked not what does the text *mean*, but instead, “What is it like to read this?” (p. 446). It was with this idea that I would attempt to hold the discussions.

In addition to the interpretive communities, another methodology, or way of looking at this study will be mentioned. In addition to reading fairy tales, the students in the research group will discuss what they have read. When analyzing discussions, or “talk,” researchers can rely on a variety of methods. These may include recording discussion groups, classifying and categorizing utterances, and finally using this data to analyze results. Since research in the field of curriculum studies does not generally rely on this type of data analysis, this type of *discourse analysis* will not be used as a methodology, but its way of looking at talk is valuable. For this reason, the contributions of discourse analysts will be examined when making connections in chapter five. Rather

than dissect discussions, discussions will be permitted and described. Based on the patterns and evolution of the discussion itself, conclusions can be drawn.

### The Conditions for the Study

Now that the study itself has been explained, the conditions under which the study takes place will be described. First, a profile of the elementary school where I teach, and will hold the discussion groups will be described. Next, within that school the selection of the students themselves will be explained. In order to obtain background information on the participants, individual interviews have been conducted. These questions will be given, along with a summary of responses. With this information, the study itself will be ready to begin.

### *A Profile of the School*

Established in 1969, Largo-Tibet Elementary is located in the suburbs on the south side of Savannah, Georgia. The school begins at pre-kindergarten, and ends at fifth grade. Total enrollment is 616 students. 324 are male and 292 are female. The school is 70% African-American, 24% white, 3% Hispanic, and 2 % Asian and 1% other. 68% of the students qualify for free or reduced lunch. Forty-three students in the school qualify for the gifted education program (GEP). These students receive enrichment, based on high ability and achievement. While the principal encourages innovative classroom lessons, the focus throughout the year is on earning Annual Yearly Progress (AYP), as determined by standardized test scores. Data teams analyze previous test scores in order to inform teachers of those standards not previously mastered in order to tailor instruction. Students wear uniforms, and the code of conduct is strictly enforced. There is an in-house suspension program for those students who receive a series of minor

violations. Suspension and expulsion rates are low. It is within this environment that a research group was selected.

### *The Research Group*

The classroom from which the students were selected is the 5<sup>th</sup> grade gifted cluster. This means that all students identified for the gifted education program are in this class, as well as high achieving students. No students in the class are classified as learning disabled, special education or slow learners. In addition, the teacher has received gifted certification. Those students identified for the gifted program attend the gifted resource classroom daily, and are provided enrichment opportunities. From this classroom, seven students were chosen. Within the group there are three boys and four girls. One of the boys is African-American, one boy is Hispanic, and the third boy is biracial. Three of the four girls are African-American, and one is biracial. Their race and gender reflects the ratios within their classroom. Three of the seven students qualify for the gifted program. The students in the research group were selected by their teacher based on their ability to read on grade level, make up class assignments and participate in class.

### *Gathering Background Information: The Interviews*

Kay Stone (in Hallett & Karasek, 2002), who explores the role of gender in fairy tales, seeks to find out the significance of fairy tales in the lives of both children and adults. In order to gather this information, Stone has conducted interviews with both groups. In these interviews, she begins with one basic question: “Do you remember anything about fairy tales, and do you feel they have affected you in any way?” (p. 397). In an effort to determine the role of fairy tales in the lives of the students in the research

group, I have developed my own set of questions. These questions will not only determine the role of fairy tales in the lives of the students, but will inquire about attitudes toward reading and school in general. With this information, I intend to learn more about the factors influencing the interpretive process of the students. Each student was asked the set of questions individually, and responses were recorded. What follows are the questions used, followed by a summary of answers.

### *Interview Questions*

1. What is your favorite subject?
2. What kinds of activities do you do during reading/LA in the classroom?
3. What kinds of books do you like to read?
4. How much time do you spend reading?
5. Do you read books- even when they are not AR?
6. What are some of the best books you have ever read?
7. Do you have a favorite author, or collection of books?
8. What do you think of when I say fairy tales? (definition, etc.)
9. What are some examples of fairy tales you know?
10. Do you have any early memories of people reading fairy tales to you?

### *Summary of Responses*

Overall, these students seem to enjoy reading. They each explained the reading instruction in their classroom, which does not involve a reading series, but instead the class doing different novel studies together. They are assigned readings, and have packets to take home with the books. These packets require students to write summaries and answer questions. The teacher generally read the book aloud to the students, and/or they

read chapters to themselves. Students rarely read the book orally in class. After the book is finished, students are required to do some form of project related to the book. While students are encouraged to be creative with these projects, they must adhere to a certain set of criteria. For example, after reading *The Sign of the Beaver* (1983), the students made a log cabin replica of the cabin that Matt built with his father. It was clear from these findings that the meetings we would have to discuss the book would differ greatly from those which the students were accustomed.

In addition to learning about the reading program within the classroom, the students shared their personal reading experience. While they are driven by a need to earn AR (Accelerated Reader) points, they did have their favorite collections of book. Some students liked mystery while others prefer books on animals or funny books. They all chose to read chapter books at or above their grade level, as opposed to picture books. Most of the students like to read at home for enjoyment, as well as in their classroom when they finish their assignments. One student said he would have at least two books going at one time- one AR book, and one book just for him. I was surprised that most of the students did not offer the same descriptions of fairy tales as I would expect. For example, one student said a fairy tale is a story that is not true. Another said fairy tales have characteristics that don't exist. They did say fairy tales were make-believe stories, but most could not pick defining characteristics. And while some of the girls mentioned certain Disney princesses that they associated with fairy tale, most of them were not able to give specific titles.

When presenting a complete picture of the reading program of which students are a part, it is necessary to at least briefly discuss the Accelerated Reader, or AR, program.

AR is a software program developed by Reading Renaissance (2008). It's purpose according to its website is to "build a culture of reading throughout your school and make reading practice more effective for every student with Accelerated Reader™, the most popular and successful reading software of all time" (<http://www.renlearn.com/ar/>) The program involves students reading designated AR books, then taking quizzes which will earn them points. Teachers receive reports so they may track the progress of the students. AR has received criticism on one level for providing quizzes which contain questions not requiring higher level thinking skills.

Regardless of its criticism, at Largo-Tibet, as well as many other local elementary schools, the AR incentive program is widely successful. Students earning landmark points have their names announced by the principal, their names are posted on the "AR train" with the corresponding number of points, prizes are given and students participate in quarterly ice cream parties. In addition to the incentives linked to AR, teachers have mandatory AR points students must earn each marking period. With all the excitement surrounding the AR books, it is not difficult to see why students gravitate towards the AR books in the media centers and in their classrooms. Why would they read anything else?

#### The Study Results: Summaries of Fairy Tales and Follow-Up Discussions

Now that the study, and conditions for it, have been established, the study itself was ready to begin. In order to establish the effectiveness of the small group discussions of this study, it would be necessary to draw comparisons to the ways these students were accustomed to experiencing literature. Following a description of this visit, a summary of the discussions I held with the students will be given. This information will be presented with the summary of the fairy tale version first, followed by a summary of the two

discussions surrounding the corresponding fairy tale. At the end of the study, students were given an evaluation to complete to get their reactions to the study itself. The results of these evaluations will follow the fairy tale discussion overview.

### *Large Group Reading Instruction in the Regular Classroom*

In their responses to the interview questions, students provided a snapshot of how the teaching of literature was conducted within the regular classroom setting. According to the students, the class read novels together, discussed them with the teacher and were then given follow up assignments and projects. In order to obtain a more detailed account of this literature instruction, I visited their classroom during one of these literature lessons.

When I visited the classroom, the teacher, Mrs. P., was reading chapter six, “For the Love of a Man” from the current novel of study, *The Call of the Wild* (1903). She stopped frequently to ask the students questions. Most of her comments were on her own interpretations, followed by a request for confirmation. For example, at one point Mrs. P. said, “So the dog was very loyal to his owner, wasn’t he?” To this question, the students responded with collective agreement. While there were a few instances when Mrs. P. asked an open-ended question, they were framed in such a way that there was clearly one correct answer she was seeking. If students provided the “wrong” answer, she would offer more clues to get them towards the correct answer. For example, Mrs. P. said, “How did the other dogs feel towards Buck?” One student was called on and answered, “They liked him.” Mrs. P. asked this follow up question: “What feelings were they *not* showing towards Buck?” Another student was called on to respond and said, “They weren’t jealous of him.” Having found her answer, Mrs. P. nodded and said yes.

As Mrs. P was reading, the students were following along diligently. I found this noteworthy, as fifth graders can get easily distracted. When one student returned from another location, the child sitting next to her whispered the correct page on which the class was looking. Only one student was “off-task,” doodling on a notepad, which the regular classroom teacher spotted and asked him to remove from his desk. Other examples that the students were following along and comprehending were when more than one student stopped the teacher to ask a question: “What happened to Buck?” and Mrs. P. responded: “Oh, that’s right. You were absent yesterday T. Hal beat Buck with a club for failing at his job, and John rescued him.” These examples of exchanges took place throughout the readings. Students were not called on to ask for their own thoughts on the readings. They were not asked to discuss with each other. While this was only one day of discussion during the novel study, more information would be necessary to determine if these types of exchangers were typical.

Following the large group lesson, I spoke with the classroom teacher. I had some more questions concerning the typical reading instruction. Mrs. P. explained that the class always did novel studies, and carried them out in the same way. The students did have vocabulary tests and comprehension tests to cover the material, as this was part of the CRCT (standardized test) and they were “in training” for it. I asked her about the tendency of my small group students to participate in discussion. After speaking with Mrs. P, it was evident that her analysis was that the students participated in classroom discussion. However, I would not categorize the lesson as promoting *student-generated* discussion I was curious to see how students would respond in our small group setting.

*The Fairy Tale Discussions*

Now that the study has been described in detail, methodology reviewed, and background of students reading experience and current literature experience shared, the study was set to take place. Over the next five weeks, students would meet to discuss the five fairy tales that had been selected. What follows is a brief summary of each story, followed by a summary of the follow-up discussions. Only first initials will be used when referring to specific comments. At the conclusion of our meetings, students will be given an evaluation, consisting of five questions, which will be used to learn their reactions to the experience.

*Rapunzel: Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm**Rapunzel summary.*

In the story, a married couple longs to have a child, and learn they will soon have a baby. The pregnant woman longs to have some of the rapunzel herb which grows in the garden. Her desire for the rapunzel grows so strong that she tells her husband she will die without it. There is only one problem; the garden belongs to an evil witch. Nonetheless, wanting to please his wife, the husband sneaks out one night to take some rapunzel from the garden. Unfortunately, the witch catches the man stealing the rapunzel. She agrees to let him keep his life if he promises her his unborn child. The prince agrees, and is let free. Once the baby is born, the witch keeps her promise and takes the baby, who was named Rapunzel. The witch locks Rapunzel in a tall tower and leaves her there. In order to make her way into the tall tower, the witch would call, "Rapunzel, Rapunzel, let down your hair!" And Rapunzel (whose golden locks had grown very long) would let down her hair for the witch to climb up. In this manner, Rapunzel herself was unable to escape from the

tower. In time, a handsome prince discovers Rapunzel in her plight. After watching the witch beckon for Rapunzel's hair, he waits until nightfall and does the same thing. When he climbs up to meet the girl, the two fall in love. They devise a plan for Rapunzel's escape. He will visit her every day, and each time he comes, he will bring a piece of straw, which they will use to make a rope. But one day the witch discovers the scheme, cuts off Rapunzel's hair and banishes her to the woods. When the prince discovers what has happened, he jumps out of the window in grief. However, he doesn't die and instead wanders aimlessly for years until he finally finds Rapunzel's place of banishment in the woods. And the two live happily ever after.

*Discussion #1.*

For the first assignment, the students were to read *Rapunzel*. I met with the students briefly the week before to give them their books and reading assignment, and to give them an overview of how our meetings would take place. To open the discussion, I simply asked "How did you like the story?" There was positive response. Four of the students said they liked the story, and the other three remained silent but nodded their heads. I then asked how the students felt about the husband collecting the rapunzel at the request of his wife. Referring to the husband getting caught, R said "I can't believe the husband was dumb enough to get caught." Several students laughed at this comment. I responded, "Would you have made the same decision as the prince- to agree to give your child to the witch?" All seven students indicated (either by saying yes or nodding heads) that they would have made the same decision. I asked, "Do you think Rapunzel would have actually died if she did not have the herb to eat?" Four of the students said no, and three remained silent. Students continue to give their thoughts on the story. R and N were

most vocal. They commented on the events in the story that do not make sense. R said, “Wouldn’t it hurt too bad for them to keep using her hair as a ladder?” As a whole, the boys were more vocal than the girls. Throughout the session, the students jumped around from one event to the next, not following the story in order. I asked several questions about the story in effort to elicit responses.

*Discussion #2.*

At the end of the first discussion on Rapunzel, students seemed to be out of comments. In order to stimulate more discussion, as well as have a more organized discussion, I decided that we could use this second meeting to go through the story in a more linear manner- page by page. I began the discussion with this statement:

“Yesterday, you all shared your thoughts on Rapunzel. I thought today we would do the same thing. But rather than just comment on any part of the story, it might help if we go page by page, and take comments on the events as they happen? Let’s look at the first page- 8.” This page by page style discussion began to elicit more discussion than the previous day. I continued to ask detailed questions about the story. For example, I asked, “Where did the witch take Rapunzel?” and “How long did it say the prince search for her?” I also asked what the students thought of Rapunzel. D said, “She was not very smart because she accidentally told the witch that the princess had come to save her.” The linear progression of the story, along with my questions, created more discussion than the previous day. At the end of our session, D showed me a book that she had brought to class. It was a book she had made in the first grade- a retelling of Rapunzel. She read it to the class. In the time remaining, we discussed how the book was similar and different to the version we had just heard.

*The Frog Prince: Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm*

*The Frog Prince summary.*

In this version of *The Frog Prince*, a princess drops a golden ball down a well. As she cries about her loss, a frog appears and says he will dive down and retrieve her ball, with the condition that the princess will make him a promise that he can come live with her in her home. He would eat off her plate and sleep in her bed, and remain her friend. While the princess thinks these are ridiculous requests for a frog to make, she agrees and the ball is retrieved. Once the ball is given to her, the princess runs away quickly. Later that evening, the frog appears at the home of the princess. Upon finding out what has happened, the king lets the frog in and tells the princess she must honor her promise. The princess proceeds to act nasty to the frog the entire evening, at one point even throwing him against a wall. It is with this action that the frog transforms himself into a prince. He tells the princess that he was under a spell, which could only be broken by a kind and beautiful princess. The king is thrilled, and the two are to be married. While this would be the expected ending place of the story, a peculiar addition is made. On their journey to the prince's kingdom, the couple comes along Henry, the prince's loyal servant. Henry has three binds around his heart, which have been placed there to prevent his heart from bursting over the sorrow of being without his master. At the sight of the prince, the binds pop off Henry's heart one by one. A little poem is inserted into the story about the resolution of Henry's grief, and this is how the story concludes.

*The Frog Prince Discussions**Discussion #1.*

In this first discussion, my opening question- “What were your reactions to the story?” brings lively responses. “Weird- interesting- didn’t like it...” were some of the comments given. It becomes necessary to call on students individually. I was pleased that students were flipping through the pages and giving me specific examples. “On page 51, the frog says he was looking for a princess who was gentle and kind.... But on page 53, the princess throws the frog against a wall.” Other contradictions were shown to me by the students. Students also began to make comparisons to other stories. “The fact that it was love at first sight was just like when the prince saw Rapunzel.” Students also had much to say about the illustrations in the story. They pointed out clues they used for their reading from things they saw in the story. For example, one student could not understand why the princess was so upset about losing her golden ball in the well. On the first page, the student pointed out there were several golden balls that the princess and her sisters are playing with. One student made an excellent observation. “In other versions of *The Frog Prince* that I have read, the princess kisses the frog, the frog turns into a prince and the two live happily ever after. In this story, that didn’t happen. There is a bunch of stuff that happens after the frog turns into a prince. So I am not left wondering what happened next.”

*Discussion #2.*

I began the discussion with what has now become a pattern of the second linear progression. “Since we have already had everyone give their feelings about the story, let’s try what we did with *Rapunzel* where we go through the story in order. What are

your thoughts here at the beginning when the girl is sitting by the well?” N. said, “What I didn’t get was why was she crying so much over that ball when there were balls all over the place.” Other students agreed with this, and attempted to locate the place where they see the balls. I then asked, “What kind of agreement did the girl make with the prince?” The students all begin talking at once.” One student said the frog said he would get her golden ball, but she would have to take him home and let him stay with her and do everything with her. D made this observation: “The fact that it was love at first sight was just like when the prince saw Rapunzel.” The students were much more talkative in this second discussion of the second story. They seemed to be warming up to what they were to be doing.

*The Snow Queen: Hans Christian Andersen*

*The Snow Queen summary.*

In this story, a brother and sister are playing in the snow when the Snow Queen arrives. Splinters of the Devil’s mirror pierce the eye and heart of the brother, and put him under the spell of the witch. The brother then leaves, apparently under some type of spell cast by the Snow Queen. The remainder of the story consists of the adventure of the sister as she desperately searches for her brother. The unusual characters she meets along the way assist her on her journey. She eventually finds her brother, and realizes she can break the spell by the power of the love she has for her brother. While this story is a well-known classic by Andersen, this condensed version, while still long, removes some of the familiar elements. For students, perhaps unfamiliar with a more complete version, it may be difficult to make connections to the elements of evil supplied by the queen, who is actually a witch.

*The Snow Queen Discussions**Discussion #1.*

At the beginning of the discussion, I said, “I have been asking you all questions to try and guide you through the story, but today I am going to avoid asking those specific questions. I am going to remove myself from the conversation as much as possible.”

When I then asked the students to give me their reactions to the story, almost immediately the comparison was made by R, and confirmed by D that this story was similar to *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* (1950). Almost the whole group agreed in unison. This was not a surprise, as the students had read this book as a class together, and spent much time on the story. I did ask the students to tell me more about this.

Subsequent comments involved the comparison of these two stories. As I had vowed to interject as little as possible, the responses to this story were coming from all different directions. N said, “How can a girl talk to flowers?” R said, “Why would a little girl sleep with a knife? While I was remaining more silent, the students began to respond to each other. In an effort to answer these boys’ questions, both D and K respond to these boys that the story is a fairy tale! The remainder of the discussion consisted of comments on details, and specifically questioning the “whys” of the story. Students spent more time responding to each other, as I was saying less.

*Discussion #2.*

The Snow Queen was a long and detailed story. Combined with the fact that I was guiding the students less resulted in a very non-linear discussion. The second discussion was established once again as that which would be analyzed page by page. D said, “The girl is playing with her brother in the snow and then he gets pricked in the heart and in

the eye.” This literal translation does not reflect the deeper meaning of the story, that the queen is actually a witch, casting her spell on the little boy. As these well-known deeper meanings were not evident to the students, their comments remained literal throughout the linear discussions. For example, K commented that Gerda could find her brother because she was given a potion. However, the story also alluded to the idea that Gerda didn’t really need the potion because she had the power of love to save her brother. Also, when the boy is finally found in the queen/witch’s ice palace, D says that the boy is dead (as opposed to just unaffected by seeing his sister as he is under the witch’s spell). While it was difficult to not guide the students through this story, I was pleased with my absence of leading questions.

*Cinderella: Charles Perrault*

*Cinderella summary.*

This version of Cinderella is credited to Charles Perrault, who is also the author given credit for Disney’s version. For this reason, there were many similarities to the Disney version. The common elements were the two step-sisters, fairy godmother, transformation of pumpkins and mice, clock striking twelve and glass slipper. An additional element of Perrault’s version which is included here, and excluded in Disney, is that there was an additional ball on the second night, which Cinderella also attended. In addition, in Perrault’s original version, and written here, is that the step-sisters beg forgiveness of Cinderella, and she gives it to them.

*Cinderella Discussions**Discussion #1.*

I began the discussion, “This is probably a story you are all familiar with. What are your comments on this version? N opened up the discussion with a question: “Where was the father?” This was followed by several responses. D and K said he was dead. It is worth noting that the father was not in fact dead in this version. R pointed this out and said, “No- he’s not dead. It just said that he didn’t have anything to do with her after he got married.” H agreed and searched for the page number where this information could be found. For the remainder of the discussion, comments largely consisted of students comparing this version to the familiar Disney version. D noticed that in this version, lizards were turned into men, but there was no lizard in the *real* version. Also observed by C was that the stepsisters in this story didn’t seem as mean. He called us to page 80 to show an example of the conversation the stepsisters were having with Cinderella, which showed they were treating her much better (than they did in the Disney version). Students also used the illustrations to help tell the story. J said that the gowns of the sisters, step-mother, and Cinderella looked alike. K observed that Cinderella and the prince looked very young.

*Discussion #2.*

For this second discussion, I opened with this comment: “In our past meetings, we have used the second discussion to go through the story page by page. I think you all have been doing an excellent job of discussing the story. It is probably not necessary to worry about going one page at a time. I’d just like to hear some more of your thoughts on the story.” While the students had apparently exhausted their comparisons to the Disney

version in our last meeting, they now gave more comments reflecting the details of this version. J said that the place that had a ball looked like a place in Mexico. C said that the crowd of people at the ball all looked like they were old, but the characters looked young. Some of the students still do not release their connections to the version with which they were the most familiar. D says, “I still can’t believe that they are being all nice to her at the end, when they were always making her do all that work and being so mean.” It is here at the end of the story that this second discussion ends. While this was the first attempt at a release of the linear version, the students did a good job guiding them through the story. While events were not discussed in chronological order, I am reminded that this is not one of the goals of the study.

*The Princess and the Pea: Hans Christian Andersen*

*The Princess and the Pea summary.*

In this story, a prince- and more specifically, his mother- are seeking a wife. Unfortunately, the queen can find no princess who is suitable for her son. One evening, a young girl happens by the palace, drenched from the pouring rain. She is brought into the house to dry, and claims she is a princess. Looking only like a drowned rat, the queen decides to put the princess to the likely test of sleeping on a pea. She calls upon her servants to find a pea, and places it under twelve mattresses, which is where the princess will spend the night. In the morning when asked how she slept, the princess confessed that she was black and blue all over after a terrible night’s sleep. Realizing that only a princess could be so sensitive, the queen is convinced that this is indeed an authentic princess. A suitable wife for the prince has been found at last. Before the story concludes, it states that the pea is still on a display, and therefore a true story has been told.

*The Princess and the Pea Discussions*

*Discussion #1.*

The discussion began with N commenting on how the prince did not like any of the princesses that he found. And then R was troubled that the pea test was only conducted with the princess in the rain: “Why in this certain setting?” R said. Always attending to detail, N said, “Why is this door outside?”- R said it looked like the gate. There was some talk about what was so special about this princess. “Why were they pampering her?” K answered that the queen really wanted to do anything to find the prince a wife. There was discussion regarding the “pea test” itself, and the illogic nature of the test. K said, “She might fall off the bed with all those mattresses.” And N asked, “How could she feel the pea under all those mattresses?” There was also some confusion about whether the princess knew about the pea. C and D said she did know, but this statement was refuted by K, who found the section of the story which had the queen sending the servants to get the pea. D held onto the belief that the princess knew about the pea, and was “faking” being hurt by it. Her exact statement: “I feel the pea... C’mon let’s get married.” C asked how the princess could feel the pea, to which J responded: “Sensitive!”

R commented on the fact that at the end, the story claimed to be true, and he wanted to know if it was. D responded that it was a myth. When I asked what a myth is, N responded that it is like when a black cat walking in front of your path and you will have bad luck. C then mentioned the myth of “bloody Mary,” or looking in the mirror in the dark, turning three times, etc. As with the other stories, a great deal of time was spent on the illustrations in the story. Students commented on the facial expressions of the

characters, and what they were thinking. Others mentioned what the characters were wearing, the way the furniture looked, the eyes of the characters. N said the eyes were weird and R said the prince was looking at the girl funny. N continued to point out details which to him made no sense. The other students in the group continued to tell him that the story was a fairy tale, and didn't always make sense.

*Discussion #2.*

*The Collection Discussion*

As discussion on The Princess and the Pea was coming full circle, I asked students to comment on the collection of stories they had read. D started us off by saying that the stories had things in common. R said the stories had evil, C commented that the stories ended with happily ever after, N said they dress in older times, D said a prince was trying to get a princess and C said there were animals. After students demonstrated that they now could identify the characteristics of a fairy tale, they began to discuss their favorite fairy tales, and why they did or did not like them. The majority of students liked Cinderella the best and the Snow Queen the least.

*The Evaluation*

After I had met with the group for all of the designated sessions, I gathered the students back into my classroom to give them each an evaluation to complete. Since I wanted the students to answer honestly and without influence from others, they sat alone with a clipboard and pencil, and were told they did not need to put their names on the evaluations. While I thought there may have been a certain level of "teacher pleasing" taking place in the answers, I reminded them that our meetings to discuss fairy tales were completed, and they would not be getting any grades or comments on these meetings. I

hoped that this would also generate honest answers. The evaluation consisted of the following five questions:

1. How much did you enjoy meeting to discuss the fairy tales?  
Very much    It was OK    Not that much    Not at all
2. Which story did you enjoy reading the most?
3. How was this discussion group different from how you study books in your regular classroom?
4. Would you be interested in meeting in a discussion group like this again?
5. Which do you prefer: discussing books in a large group (whole class) or a small group like the one we had? Explain.

For the first question, requesting that students rate the discussions themselves, five said they enjoyed the sessions very much, and two said the sessions were OK. For question two, answers varied for which tale was the favorite. Four of the seven students gave a reason why they picked a tale as their favorite, even though this was not required by the question. The reasons for selection provided more insight than the tales itself. One picked *Cinderella* because “I am used to that story.” Another picked *Cinderella* because it was “much different than the Disney version.” Several picked favorites because of the illustrations. One picked *The Princess and the Pea* because it was short. This student also gave brief answers for the questions. One student said *The Snow Queen* was her favorite because “the story shows how a person does everything she can to find a loved one. Also it shows her adventure was finding him.”

For the third question asking how this discussion was different than the classroom discussion, student answers were consistent with the idea that the classroom requires

them to answer questions, but does not ask their opinions. The responses should speak for themselves: (In the classroom)- “Usually everyone doesn’t always share their opinion. Also you can talk more than in class.” In small group, “you don’t have to answer questions about the story.” “In this group we can express our feelings and there is no right or wrong” “Mrs. Lossing let us go free with our feelings and we didn’t really have to hold them back” “We read the books ourselves and we didn’t have to do a report or answer questions like a test.” “In our class we didn’t tell our feelings. We just discussed what happened in the book.” I purposefully did not ask students to tell which they preferred in this question. I simply wanted to find out how they felt this discussion group was different than how they studied books in the classroom.

In question four, when I asked if students would be interested in doing this type of discussion group again, I really thought I could get honest responses. If students thought there was the possibility of being asked to do this again, they certainly would tell whether or not they wanted to participate. All students said they would like to participate in discussion groups again. While one student said it was a way to get out of class, this student was also the same one who preferred *Princess and the Pea* because it was short. And the student also added that the discussions were fun. While I did not ask the students to provide reasons why they would or would not like to participate in discussion groups in the future, most provided reasons anyway. Other reasons students said they would like to meet in discussion groups again are as follows: “It is more fun to read the book ourselves.” “Yes. It is fun and you get to read with your friends.” “Yes, because this was fun. We didn’t have to do work and not talk about the book. We always had fun with the book.” “Yes, because you get to express your thoughts and tell how you feel about

something.” “Yes because I can have everyone’s honest opinions. Also, it might get more people interested in talking about your opinions except for writing them.”

For the fifth question, overwhelmingly, the students preferred the small group discussion over the large group. One of the main problems the students had with the large group discussion is that it is loud, people talk at once and interrupt each other. Some of the responses were as follows: “In a small group, because it was quieter and easier to discuss with a small group and it wouldn’t be so many people talking at one time which would be confusing.” “I prefer a smaller group like the one we had because it’s less noise and more discussing” “A small group because you can have more time to express your opinion. Also it will not be as loud.” “Small group. It will be easier to think.” “I would like a small group because that way everybody will have a chance to say what they feel or thought they could add.” “I would prefer the small group we had because it was much more fun and there are some kids in the class that just like to interrupt.” “I like to have a small group like we had because if we had a bigger group people would be yelling and fussing and it is not fair to the people that want to talk about the book.”

At the conclusion of the readings and discussions, it is hoped that what has taken place is that fairy tales, intended for children, have been genuinely given to them. By removing the expectations associated with follow up assignments, have students been given the freedom to create a new discourse? And how will this new discourse impact what takes place in a traditional classroom? Further, how will these results impact the field of curriculum studies? Through the analysis of the findings of this study, these questions will be examined in the following chapter.

## CHAPTER 5

## A DISCOURSE OF DISCOVERY

In the field of curriculum studies, the term *paradigm shift* is frequently used. Within the context of education, those in the field contend that that which has become familiar may not be what is best for students. Familiarity, in many cases has become rigidity, and needs to be unsettled. This study has set out to create a paradigm shift in the way students are “taught” literature, as well as examine the roles of teacher and student within literature discussions. In contrast to the equivalence of spoon-feeding the predetermined interpretations and main ideas, students will be provided the opportunity to experience literature in the classroom that is actually for them. In an effort to ensure the literature experience not be contaminated by the teacher’s requirements, no typical literature assignments were given in connection to the reading of the fairy tales. Now that these discussions have taken place and summarized, it is important to analyze these discussions in order to determine the relevance of this study to classroom teachers, as well as to the field of curriculum studies. To begin this analysis, we return to the guiding question of this study: ***In the elementary classroom, how does the unencumbered experience of reading fairy tales create a new discourse which can allow the voice of the child to be heard in the classroom?***

The term “discourse” arises frequently in the field of curriculum studies, and has many meanings associated with it. In this study, discourse is synonymous with the discussions that have resulted between the children and me concerning the fairy tales that have been read. In order to analyze these discussions, it is first necessary to analyze discourse itself. For discourse within the classroom, the speech genre of classroom talk

will be examined. As a result of this classroom talk, it will be explained how the power structure of the classroom is organized. After the current situation of classroom discourse is understood, the fairy tale discussions will be analyzed. From this analysis, this new discourse will be contrasted with the existing classroom discourse. Implications for teachers, as well as for the field of curriculum studies will be explained. Finally, this study provides a foundation for new explorations for research in the ways students participate in discussions. By creating a new type of discourse, this study will permit the reading of the fairy tale, or any literature, to give students a voice in the classroom.

#### Discourse Analysis: Analyzing Talk

In order to analyze the discussions about these fairy tales, it is first necessary to frame the discussions within discourse itself. Ruth Wodak (1996) is in the field of discourse studies. While discourse implies an interaction between a speaker and a listener, Wodak (1996) adds another behavioral level of discourse. She arrives at the understanding that discourse is “a text in context.” What results is “a specific form of social interaction, interpreted as a complete communicative event in a social situation” (Wodak, 1996, p. 14). Wodak’s added layer of discourse results in what she calls a *critical* discourse analysis. It is this critical level which connects her to the field of curriculum studies. Critical discourse analysis not only recognizes the context of discourse, but the social action and situation of it. The value of Wodak’s discourse approach is the attention to the discourse itself, within the context where it is spoken.

“A fully ‘critical’ account on discourse would thus require a theorization and description of both the social processes and structures which give rise to production of a text, and of the social structures and processes within which

individuals or groups as social historical subjects, create meanings in their interaction with texts.” (Wodak, 1996, pp. 2-3)

It is this added dimension, which applies to this study.

This is a study which recognizes the context of discussion. Wodak (1996) has an interesting description of context for discourse. She sees context in the form of concentric circles. The smallest circle is the discourse unit itself, and the micro-analysis of the text. The next circle is speaker and audience, and the interactions between these two groups within their roles. The next circle is the setting itself- location of time and space. The next circle is the institution. And the largest circle is society. “The integration of all these context levels would then lead to an analysis of discourse as social practice” (Wodak, 1996, p. 21). By providing context for discourse, Wodak creates a connection between the approach of interpretive communities, which recognizes context, and the discussion itself. Further, curriculum theorists recognize contexts surrounding both the text and the student. It is these recognitions which will be occurring within this study. To fully examine the discourse of students, it is first necessary to examine the discourse taking place within their classrooms.

*Classroom Talk: The Speech Genre of Teachers and Students*

Bakhtin (1986) recognizes that language is a part of all human activity. Further, this language is made up of both oral and written utterances. While these utterances can be broken down into parts (specifically thematic content, style and compositional structure), they all make up the utterance as a whole. While all separate utterances are unique, “each sphere in which language is used develops its own *relatively stable types* of these utterances” (Bakhtin, 1986, p. 60). It is these stable types of utterances, dependent

upon their sphere, or context, which makes up “speech genres.” Speech genres for Bakhtin (1986) are the accepted ways of speaking in a specific context. The stable utterances which take place in classrooms between teachers and students compose the speech genre of classroom talk. This classroom talk becomes a vital part of the interpretive community of the student. But what does this classroom talk look like, and what are the roles of the participants?

Classroom talk positions the teacher as the one in authority, who has all the answers that the student must then discover. According to Marshall, et al., (1995) research on classroom language can be summarized by a three-turn pattern. The pattern consists of teacher question-student response-teacher evaluation. “The questions tend to be closed rather than open, inviting factual or literal answers, rather than answers requiring extensive reasoning or evaluation” (Marshall et al., 1995, p. 6). This type of talk is evidenced by Mrs. P. when she presents a series of closed questions to the students, disguised as eliciting free discussion. For example, when Mrs. P. says, “So the dog was very loyal to his owner, wasn’t he?” she is providing the interpretation and simply allowing students the opportunity to agree; a closed question. This “transmission model” (p. 6) is basically the teacher deciding what information the students are to absorb, and does not take into account the interpretive process of the reader. This type of talk is so prevalent in the classroom that it has become automatic. “Stated simply, in most cultures people learn how to think by listening to-and participating in- the ways in which people around them talk” (Marshall et al., 1995, p. 7). These ways of speaking within the classroom have become automatic, and have created an understood power structure, by which both teachers and students abide.

### Power Relations in the Classroom

Curriculum theorists dedicate a great deal of research to alternative approaches for those within the traditional classroom which perpetuate the existing power structure. Several within the field have described this power structure. Freire (1970) is frequently referenced as he describes the relationship between the oppressor and the oppressed. For Freire, the recognizable characteristic of this relationship is that of *prescription*:

“Every prescription represents the imposition of one’s individual choice upon another, transforming the consciousness of the person prescribed to into one that conforms with the prescriber’s consciousness. Thus, the behavior of the oppressed is a prescribed behavior, following as it does the guidelines of the oppressor.”

(Freire, 1970, p. 29)

The oppressor decides what is important, and molds the actions of the oppressed to fit this decision. This relationship is seen between teacher and student in the classroom, and specifically in the area of literature interpretation where the teacher’s perception is the correct one that the student is expected to learn.

Within this relationship, Freire (1970) recognizes the oppressive capability of dialogue itself. Freire analyzes dialogue as a human phenomenon. In doing so, he looks at the basis for dialogue itself- the *word*. (p. 68). He acknowledges that words contain two dimensions- reflection and action. He warns that dialogue between people cannot occur if one group maintains power by being the namers. “Only dialogue, which requires critical thinking, is also capable of generating critical thinking. Without dialogue there is no communication, and without communication there can be no true education” (Freire,

1970, p. 74). Freire's description here calls for responsibility on the part of both teachers and students.

Based largely on the works of Foucault (1984), Ruth Wodak (1996) also discusses the oppressor/oppressed relationship, within the context of discourse. In situations where information is to be communicated, there are frequently barriers which can contribute to misunderstanding of the language. This presents a situation where the insiders (those who possess the knowledge of the language) are in a seat of privilege over the outsiders (who do not understand the language). Wodak (1996) calls this condition *disorder in discourse*. According to Wodak (1996), these barriers can be caused by a variety of factors including technical jargon, gender, class, ethnicity, as well as the structure of the discourse itself. These power relations are visible in the classroom, and certainly create a discourse disorder in the traditional ways literature is discussed. Without erasing the differences in students which may be involved with discourse disorder, this study has sought to seek to examine how the roles of teachers and students within the discussion can create a new discourse, which allows all voices to be heard. In this study, the power structure is created through discourse itself. Specifically, the *Voice of the teacher* dominates the voice of the student. This power structure, created by discourse, is challenged by the unencumbered experience of students reading fairy tales.

#### The Analysis: The Fairy Tale Discussions

It is here that the analysis of the fairy tale discussions will be given. While discourse analysts may detail and categorize utterances, that quantitative approach will not be used here. Instead, the evolution and transformation of the discussions will be examined. A summary of each fairy tale will be given, followed by corresponding

discussions. In addition to the discussions, the evaluation that students were asked to complete at the end of the study will be analyzed. In this analysis, the evaluation of the dialogue of both teacher and student is what is noteworthy. These transformed discussions will result in a novel discourse; one in which teacher and students have redefined roles.

### *Rapunzel*

During this first meeting, most of the students are reluctant to talk without being first called upon to do so. There are two students (R and N) who are doing most of the talking. I find myself asking more questions than I had intended. I also notice that many of the types of questions I am asking can be answered with yes or no. While I do follow these questions with “why” or “why not,” they are still requiring only limited responses. In addition, in analyzing my questions, I notice that I am asking closed questions, which are intended to be answered with one “right” answer. For example, at one point I asked, “Where did the witch take Rapunzel?” These types of questions resemble the typical classroom talk explained by Marshall. In an effort to keep the discussion moving, and to get students involved, my continuous questioning is likely simulating the classroom talk experienced in the regular classroom. I want the students to feel comfortable discussing, but I also want them to have a novel experience when discussing literature.

In the second discussion, I decided to have the students go through the story in order (page by page) to give their comments. I thought that by progressing in a linear fashion, the discussion may have a better flow, and stimulate more comments. The students are more animated in with their comments. While this could be attributed to the linear format, it is also likely they are becoming more familiar and comfortable with me

and with talking about the story. They seem to be enjoying themselves. For example, at one point N shows his excitement about taking on the role of the prince when he says, “Yeah, I’d have taken my big stick with me!” While there are three boys and four girls, it is interesting that the boys are all very talkative, but only one of the girls jumps in and talks freely. The other three are more timid and wait to be brought into the conversation. After the first week, I am pleased with the level of participation by the students. I am less pleased with my own role. While students are participating more, I am still “leading” the discussion with my questions. While I have provided a discussion of the first story that is unencumbered by written follow-up questions, I am still encumbering the discussion with my guiding questions. I will focus on this for the next story.

### *The Frog Prince*

As the students began discussing *The Frog Prince*, I made the attempt to work on my questioning technique. While fewer questions would be best, I attempted to make the questions I did ask more open ended. I also thought that by contributing my own questions to the group, I could take myself out of the position as leader. An example of this is when I said, “I was so surprised when the king agreed that the princess should keep her promise to the frog.” Since we all have different background knowledge, which comes to the discussion group, mine can include what I have learned about fairy tales. Students are becoming more involved, and making some connections on their own. For example, when D comments that both stories show love at first sight, she is not only making connections, but demonstrating knowledge of a fairy tale characteristic as well. Another example of this is when C comments that both stories we have read seem like they took place a long time ago. It is encouraging that students are talking about their

opinions, as well as making observations about contradictions and comparisons to other stories.

For the second discussion, we return to the linear format. Students' comments therefore correspond to the events as they occurred in the story. Several of the students still point out puzzling elements of the story. This is demonstrated when there is much confusion over why the girl in the story needs a golden ball. N says, "What I didn't get was why was she crying so much over that ball when there were balls all over the place?" The fact that students are asking the group to look at page numbers demonstrates their involvement with these stories, and their eagerness to get others involved. This also demonstrates a role-reversal, as usually it is the teacher calling the students to look at page numbers. This simple shift in activity is an example of a shift in roles, which can empower students. At the end of this discussion, I was pleased with the student participation, which to me reflects their enthusiasm with this approach. In addition, I felt my questioning was less guiding. I could still work on saying even less however. This would be the focus for the next story.

### *The Snow Queen*

In this discussion, I attempt to remove myself even further from the position of questioner/leader. In this meeting, I told students I would remove myself from the "conversation." In making this statement, I was hoping for two things. One, by making the commitment out loud to the students, I was hoping that I would be able to keep the promise to myself. Second, by referring to our discussions as a conversation, I was hoping to provide an additional level of comfort for the students to talk to each other without me. By minimizing my involvement, I essentially turned over the discussion to

the students. As I began to say less, students responded to each other more, and really were mirroring a conversation. This is seen in the exchange between N, who is questioning, and D and K who respond that is because the story is a fairy tale! The students were conducting themselves at times as if I wasn't there. However, this story was long and contained several tangents as the little girl conducted the search for her brother. It was a challenge to not interject more and call attention to those things which were "important," and contained hidden "meanings." I looked forward to the linear discussion, as this first discussion consisted of detailed comments that did not build upon each other.

As we moved through the linear analysis, it became evident that *The Snow Queen* was certainly the longest and most challenging story we had looked at so far. My own challenge of *not* guiding students through it was even more difficult. The students were focusing on minor details, as opposed to main ideas like who was the snow queen and what did she do? Who was the main character and what was her goal? However, when I examine these questions, I realize that these are MY questions, developed from my own traditional training. Perhaps it could be argued that by answering these questions, students prove comprehension of the story- and without comprehension there would be no understanding. However, I must force myself to remain focused on the goal of this study- to *allow* the readings and the discussions. I must continuously remind myself that by removing all constraints, I must also remove the constraints of the ruler of comparison I have in my own mind.

While the discussion surrounding *The Snow Queen* demonstrated a turning point in the discussions, in that a transition was being made towards student ownership of the

discussion, I wanted to see if there was more I could do to unencumber the discussions. To do this, I began to examine the structure of the discussion groups themselves. In doing so, I examined the linear format of analysis, which had now become a pattern for our second meeting. Even though students were providing a great deal of responses during these page by page discussions, I reminded myself that *amount* of discussion was not the measure of success in this study. By deciding that a linear analysis was necessary, I was infringing my own beliefs of the “right” way to discuss literature with the students. In addition, though I was allowing students to give their own responses, by taking the students through the book page by page, I was still acting as the guide. In keeping with the goals of the study, I decided to remove the practice of this type of analysis for the remaining two stories.

### *Cinderella*

The analysis of the *Cinderella* discussions is an illustration of how students are influenced by their interpretive communities. Almost all comments were made in comparison to the Disney version. At one point, students were even overcompensating for making comparisons, as they were giving details (e.g. the father being dead) that they remembered from the Disney version, even though these details were not to be found in this story. These students are products of a Disney culture. For them, the Disney versions of fairy tales, especially *Cinderella*, is the one to which all others are compared. At one point, D refers to the Disney version as the real version. By referring to the Disney version as the “real” version, it is evident how much these animated tales have permeated the lives of these students. Ironically, the Perrault version the students read for this study

is the one Disney used to create his movie. For these students however, Disney's version will always be the original; it is the first they knew.

While it is tempting to analyze aspects of marketing and culture connected with the Disney influence, it is important to remain guided by the goal of the study. However, the Disney influence does call attention to the recognition of interpretive communities themselves. These students are a part of an interpretive community which is influenced by the culture of Disney. This interpretive community has an impact on the types of interpretations of future fairy tales they encounter. This study acknowledges the existing interpretive communities, or factors which impact the students' perspectives. What is noteworthy here is the awareness that by having students participate in these unencumbered discussion groups, they are creating a new interpretive community. This new community both recognizes and validates the role of students within the interpretation process. In addition, by allowing these interpretations to exist, without analyzing or testing them, individual voices- within the context of unique backgrounds and experiences, are accepted. As this allowance of a student interpretation process, not directed by teachers, is not seen in the traditional classroom. It is the hope that this novel way of discussing literature will transfer into their regular classroom, and influence future literature discussions in a positive way.

### *The Princess and the Pea*

As we prepare for our last story, I am confident that the teacher-made constraints attached to literature discussion have been removed as much as possible. In addition to the absence of written follow-up activities, I have also made an effort to remove constraints that can be found within the nature of discussion itself. While I had started by

asking specific questions to guide the students along, these questions became more open-ended, and eventually evolved into me acting as one of the members of the discussion group, as opposed to the one in charge of it. Finally, I also changed the structure of the discussion, by removing the method of discussing the book page by page, or in a linear fashion. While I feel good about the removal of these constraints, I am also aware that student perceptions of the teacher as leader, which have long been a part of these students' interpretive community, still exist. However, I have removed many layers of manipulation practiced by teachers in the literature discussion process. It is with this most unencumbered experience so far that the students begin the final discussion.

The discussion begins with student analysis of the events continuing to be literal. Questions such as "How can a pea make you in that much pain?" demonstrate that students are not necessarily entranced by the fictitious events of the fairy tale. Instead, they are still guided by the rules of logic they have been taught. Again, while it is not the content of the interpretations as much as the nature itself, I am pleased by the level of interaction between the students. They are answering each other's questions without hesitation. Further, while the discussion began as a literal question and answer session about the events, it turned towards a discussion of the illustrations, and how these could tell the story. While the students may spend so much time discussing illustrations because they are perhaps more easily interpreted, it also illustrates a deeper level of the story, beyond what is told in the words. Through this discussion, students have found a story within a story.

As *The Princess and the Pea* was the shortest story the students had read, and they only had one discussion session remaining, I decided to use the last session to have the

students discuss their reactions to the stories as a whole. The discussion started off with comments referring to the similarities of all the stories. In making these comments, students are essentially creating a list of the characteristics of the fairy tale. In addition, the students were making comparisons and connections between the stories, as well as other stories they had read. I did ask students to share their favorites and least favorites, and this gave them an opportunity to express their opinions. My response to the analyses students have given is excitement. Had I come up with a test for them, I would have given questions for which they had already provided answers. In addition, they were even demonstrating deeper levels of the story (as seen in the illustrations) that I would not have even thought to ask them. This demonstrates the potential that children have, when they are allowed to create on their own.

The discussion begins with N commenting on how the prince did not like any of the princesses that he found. And then R is troubled that the pea test was only conducted with the princess in the rain: “Why in this certain setting?” Always attending to detail, N says, “Why is this door outside?” R responds that it looks like the gate. There was some talk about what was so special about this princess. “Why were they pampering her?” K responded that the queen really wanted to do anything to find the prince a wife. There is discussion regarding the “pea test” itself, and the illogic nature of the test. K says, “She might fall off the bed with all those mattresses.” And N asks, “How could she feel the pea under all those mattresses?” There is also some confusion about whether the princess knew about the pea. C and D say she did know, but this statement is refuted by K, who finds the section of the story which has the queen sending the servants to get the pea. D held onto the belief that the princess knew about the pea, and was “faking” being hurt by

it. Her exact statement: “I feel the pea... C’mon let’s get married.” C asks how the princess could feel the pea, to which J responds: “Sensitive!”

As with the other stories, a great deal of time was spent on the illustrations in the story. Students commented on the facial expressions of the characters, and what they were thinking. Others mentioned what the characters were wearing, the way the furniture looked, the eyes of the characters. N says the eyes are weird and R says the prince is looking at the girl funny. C responds to this with the comment, “Like maybe it means he doesn’t really know about her.” Another comment about the illustrations comes from R: “On pages 112 and 113, it looks like they are showing what is happening downstairs, and then on the other page it looks like maybe what is going to happen in the future.” These comments regarding the illustrations are unsolicited by me, and the interaction takes place strictly between the students.

#### *The Collection Discussion*

As discussion on *The Princess and the Pea* was coming full circle, I asked students to comment on the collection of stories they had read. D. started us off by saying that the stories had things in common. R said the stories had evil, C commented that the stories ended with happily ever after, N said they dress in older times, D said a prince was trying to get a princess and C said there were animals. After students demonstrated that they now could identify the characteristics of a fairy tale, they began to discuss their favorite fairy tales, and why they did or did not like them. The majority of students liked Cinderella the best, and the Snow Queen the least. Additional comments were made about favorite parts of the stories. More detailed information about opinions towards the fairy tales as a whole would be gathered in the evaluations that would be given.

### *Evaluation*

Letting go of my traditional role as a facilitator was not as easy as I originally thought it would be. I was curious to see how students felt about their new roles within the discussion group. How did their attitudes toward participation in our discussions compare with their attitudes toward participation in their classrooms? These answers could be found in the evaluation responses summarized in chapter four. In analyzing the results, I was at first worried that students would be unable to break away from the pattern of writing what the teacher would want to hear. However, what I read appeared to be students sharing their honest feelings. And they were telling me how they thought these feelings and opinions are important-in relation to what they are reading. The students enjoyed these discussion groups because they allowed them to talk, to be heard, and with no constraints of having to know certain things. I was surprised that all the students said they preferred small groups. I thought perhaps at least a few students who did not share as much in the small group may prefer the *safety* which can be provided by the large group discussion. However, this was not the case. By providing students with an evaluation to complete, I was able to get a window inside the minds of the children regarding the study. For this reason, the value of the evaluation response cannot be underestimated.

### *Cumulative Analysis*

While the analysis of the individual discussions of each book is important, it is the transformation of the discussion over time which is most noteworthy. In the beginning, with *Rapunzel*, my efforts were focused on getting students to participate. For this reason, I asked specific questions. These questions resembled the closed questioning technique of

classroom talk. By the second story, *The Frog Prince*, both the group and me were becoming more comfortable. They participated more, and while I still asked questions, they were more general and allowed for more possibilities. In addition, in an effort to place myself as equal to the students, I gave my own comments on what I thought about the story. While *The Snow Queen* was long and (to me) packed with symbolism, I tried to resist the urge to guide students towards interpretations that matched mine. By reducing my questioning, students began to respond more to each other, which led to them having more control of the discussion group. By the fourth story, *Cinderella*, I had made the decision to stop the practice of guiding the students through a linear discussion of the story. By the time we reached *The Princess and the Pea*, students took charge of the discussion group. Even though the story was short, the discussion progressed to a deeper level involving the sub-story told by the illustrations. It is through this transformation of the fairy tale discussions that a new discourse within the classroom has been created.

#### Possibilities of a New Therapeutic Discourse

##### *A Therapeutic Discourse*

*Discourse disorder* is described by Wodak (1996) as that condition within discourse where those who possess the knowledge (in this case, teachers) become the insiders and those who do not yet possess this knowledge (in this case, students) become the outsiders. This is what is taking place in the classroom today, specifically in the context of literature discussions. In Wodak's search to eliminate this disorder, she conducts a case study which comes close to finding a solution. Her study involves examining the discourse which takes place in a support group consisting of suicidal patients. Because of the dynamics of the group, the *rules* of discourse are suspended.

While there is a group leader, the members of the group are all vulnerable, and susceptible to emotional breakdowns and temporary periods of silence. These problems are recognized and worked through by the group. Through her methods of discourse analysis, Wodak observes that this type of interaction results in a minimum of misunderstandings between the members. The result is what Wodak terms a *therapeutic discourse*. In other words, a situation has occurred in which communication is facilitated as a result of the breaking down of boundaries between those involved in the discourse.

It is this therapeutic discourse which most resembles the nature of this study. Like in Wodak's case study, the rules of traditional literature discussion are suspended. There are no guiding questions- either oral or written. There are no follow-up assignments or tests. Students are not forced to participate. All opinions are valued. This type of comfort zone resembles that in Wodak's case study. In addition, an added level of comfort is provided by the genre of literature itself, the fairy tale, which is familiar to the students. They are not intimidated by it because they are stories they already know, or sound similar to ones they know. And they know that the fairy tale itself suspends rules. Anything can happen there. There does not have to be an explanation for everything. These conditions result in a therapeutic discourse, in which the students thrive.

#### *Implications for Teachers*

Teachers may say, "I do this in my classroom. I allow free discussion of literature." Even with teachers who are steadily working to include the voices of students, the teacher talk may be so engrained into the classroom, that either they and/or the students cannot escape it. In addition, even with "freedom" of discussion, it is unlikely that most teachers are removing all follow up assignments related to literature

discussions. It is the attachment of the follow-up assignments and tests, as well as questioning techniques, which control the way students look at books. They know sooner or later they will be asked to find THE answers. This is not freedom. While fairy tales were chosen for their link to children, this study can be generalized to all literature. Further, while teachers cannot afford to do away with all written assignments, the trained silence of teachers in these discussion groups *can* be practiced across subject areas. In this way, teachers can practice a new role, one in which they do not possess all the power.

Many teachers will still be concerned with the mastery of objectives, and this concern is reasonable. For these teachers, it is noteworthy that in the last discussion, students were able to demonstrate knowledge of fairy tale characteristics, as well as make comparisons and connections between the stories, and to other stories they had read. In addition, it is not the intention that this type of literature group becomes a replacement for all types of literature instruction. There is certainly a time and place for written assignments regarding literature in the classroom. Teachers cannot be completely removed from classroom discussions, nor should they be. Instead, this new discourse allows teachers and students the chance to step outside classroom talk and experiment with re-identified roles. In doing this, students are free to have genuine responses to literature, as opposed to the contrived responses they give to please the teacher.

If other teachers are considering incorporating an unencumbered approach to discussing literature, there are some factors to consider which may alter the results found in this study. First, I am not the classroom teacher of these students, so I do not have the stigma of being the one who assesses them in all subject areas. Since they were aware that there were “no strings attached” and they could speak to me freely, this may have

affected how these discussions would have taken place in their own classrooms. The additional element of the peers in the regular classroom might also influence the results. One important consideration is also the selection of the fairy tales. In this study, these “popular” tales were all of European descent. However, the members of the group were either African-American or Hispanic. This misalignment may impact the degree with which these students could identify with, or even understand these stories, and therefore could affect interpretation of them. While these factors must be taken into consideration, what is not to be overlooked is the transformation that I as the teacher have experienced. By practicing the relinquishing of power, I can begin to approach all teaching differently. This study then, provides opportunities for all teachers of literature.

*Curriculum Studies: Theory in Practice in Theory*

Research within the field of curriculum studies provides the context for this study. Those in the field wish to challenge the power structure within the classroom and widen the lens with which we look at children as students. However, if curriculum theorists intend to undo traditional ways of teaching, they must provide more than just theory. There must be some practical ways teachers can begin to shift not only the perspective of their students, but their own perspectives as well. These changes can only be made within the realistic setting of the conditions in which teachers find themselves. It may be unrealistic to expect teachers to ban together and form marches against boards of education and the offices of national test makers. Instead, teachers show up to work each day and teach the objectives they have been given, which will then be tested on the next standardized test. The results of these tests will serve not only as a measure of student performance, but teacher performance as well. This is the state of education today.

However, if teachers can provide even one activity which will upset this power structure and create a rupture in the traditional ways we do things, students may actually be given a genuine experience in the classroom. It is the hope that this study will provide one of these activities.

### *Implications for the Field*

Embedded in the field of curriculum studies, and reflected in the goals of this study, postmodernists are seeking to upset power structure within schools and provide new ways of learning. In doing this, student voices can be heard. Joe Kincheloe (2002) describes the postmodernist view:

“Postmodernists “admit previously inadmissible evidence, derived from new questions asked by once *excluded voices*, challenge hierarchical structures of knowledge and power that promote ‘experts’ above ‘the masses,’ and seek *new ways of knowledge* that transcend scientifically verified facts and ‘reasonable’ linear arguments deployed in a quest for certainty” [italics added] (p. 12).

This study has examined both excluded voices (the students’), and new ways of knowledge (the unencumbered reading experience). What started as a look at the experience of reading the fairy tale has evolved into an exploration of discussion itself. At the heart of discussion, the voice becomes the focus. This voice is what has been ignored, discounted, erased and swallowed. This consumption of the voice is seen in the fairy tale itself as it moves away from its oral roots, as well as the child’s voice in the classroom. With the help of the teacher’s silence, these voices are heard within this study.

While this study has investigated the possibilities of a new classroom discourse, many questions remain regarding the impact of speech itself, as well as social factors

which affect discussion. There are those in the field of curriculum who have contributed to these concepts of speech and society and the connections between them. These views can contribute to a deeper look into classroom discussions. Through literature, ways of doing things with words can be explored. While there are many in the field that have done this, allowing *students* this opportunity, within this new framework of a new discourse provides new areas of exploration.

This study is not revolutionary. Small group discussions about fairy tales is not earth shattering research. It is not a great discovery that children's voices can be lost, consumed under the heading of the speech genre of the classroom. What needs to be identified is our *complacency* with this situation. While Maxine Greene (1978) calls upon teachers to act in order to change the conditions of education, she can understand why this change rarely occurs. She says "when we look at the everyday reality of home and school and workplace, we can scarcely imagine ourselves taking moral positions" (p. 44). Instead of being lulled into the everyday reality, Greene (1995) suggests instead a "wide-awakeness" to other alternatives. New realities can be created. While the existing interpretive communities of the classroom (including classroom talk and power structure) have been recognized, it is this new interpretive community, this unencumbered discourse, created in this study which can provide a new reality.

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