

## Literature and Education Research Methodologies

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The Centre for Research and Education in the Arts (CREA) emerges from the Faculty of Education of the University of Technology Sydney. Both the arts and technology relate humankind to their environment and tell stories about those relationships; these stories may be expressed in architecture and engineering; they may also be expressed philosophically, critically, artistically, scientifically, anthropologically, sociologically, visually in painting and sculpture and theatre, aurally in music, kinesthetically in dance and movement. CREA defines the arts in a very generous way, both as creative arts - dance, design, literature, music and visual arts - and as the broader conception of liberal arts that has its historical roots in the *quadrivium* and *trivium*. Our emphasis, within a contemporary paradigm that is interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary, is on the arts in relation to children and young people - that is, on the *arts in education*.

Part of the contemporary paradigm is that researchers borrow from each other. Subjectivity, story and autobiography (the centred subject) have become legitimate methodologies in a number of research areas: Denzin and Lincoln note that theories are now read in the narrative terms (1998 p. 22) which Van Maanen calls 'tales of the field' (1988). They also extend the cultural theorists' notion of the researcher as *bricoleur* (for example, Weinstein and Weinstein 1991, p. 161) and note that 'the researcher-as-bricoleur-theorist works between and within competing and overlapping perspectives and paradigms' (1998, p.4).

It is important to note that research methodologies reflect cultural attitudes. The twentieth century was the age of the individual, and it is no wonder that the significance of the researcher was enhanced at this time. There is however a postmodern irony in the fact that as individuals became free to do their own thing (that is, they became the centre of their universe, who 'did it my way' and have 'got to be me'), external centres were being interrogated and de-centred. This has been freeing, and has been a necessary part of our philosophical evolution as a global culture, but it has also caused considerable unease.

That's the first point. The second point is this. Although the global culture into which we are evolving is engaging with the resources necessary to sustain life - that is, with issues of sustainability - it is not engaging with the resources needed to sustain that most local and profound miniculture or environment, that of our own life, which is indeed mortal and in physical terms unsustainable. We are educating our children increasingly well in terms of the environment, but an uncentred, multicultural, diverse, society has difficulty in sustaining the hearts and spirits of its young (witness the increasing use of drugs and the appalling youth suicide figures). We feed them the best food, they may wear the best brand of clothing and have expensive toys, but we studiously and carefully avoid discussing contentious issues about the deep questions of life. Some children live as centred individuals in an uncentred world with few reference points and handholds. This is a perplexing issue for educators, who rightly desire to show respect for different philosophical and religious points of view.

What have these two points to do with each other?

The arts are providers of sustenance. They are one of the few places where discussion and philosophical enquiry can touch the deepest issues of life. Artistic works present worldviews; poets and artists preceded the Greenies in celebrating the beauty and arguing for the preservation of the natural environment, both because of what it is in itself but also because of the way it sustains the human soul or spirit. Artistic works reflect and discuss and celebrate spiritual needs and concerns. The global culture in which we find ourselves - technological and commercial - is exciting but it is also overwhelming: jobs disappear, conditions change, values alter; there will be no comfortable slot or perhaps even vocation for most of the children who are currently in our schools. The arts - broadly and separately - are not an emerging field of practice, but in a knowledge society - and particularly in a knowledge economy where knowledge is emphasised in terms of commercial enterprise - they have an increasing significance which is not only life-long but life-giving.

Kermode and others have noted that we use the arts as a means of making sense of the world. One of the first sustained art forms with which children are likely to engage is children's literature, which through the power of story introduces children to diverse ways of seeing the world, diverse ways of acting in the world, and diverse ways of coping with the world. Children's books present stories of living and offer a range of worldviews. These equip children not only with literacy skills, but with life skills.

Arts methodologies provide tools that subsequently inform pedagogical practices. Children's literature, and the picturebook in particular, constitutes a field of research that is regenerating literary criticism in much the same way as feminist and postcolonial discussions did, and that does so between and within competing and overlapping perspectives and paradigms. Picture books are a unique adaptation of the novel genre; increasingly, they are studied as literature; art; cultural studies; reflections and analyses of contemporary and eschatological issues; sociocultural statements about constructs of the child, childhood and society; representations of past and present utopias; idealised memories; reflections of loss; and ideological expressions that are both advocacy and activism. As a *researcher-as-bricoleur* in this field, I want to apply as my research tool and as my way of seeing the concept of the chronotope, introduced into literary criticism by the Russian theorist Mikhail M. Bakhtin (1895-1975).

The chronotope (from *chronos*, time, and *topos*, space) is a mathematical term used in relation to Einstein's theory of relativity, which redescribed time not as the objective absolute of Newtonian physics, but rather as subjective, changeable, multiple, and dependent on the position of the observer. Bakhtin applied it to the novel to refer to the relationships in narrative between *people and events* on the one hand, and *time and space* on the other.

Chronotopes are the organising centres for the fundamental narrative events of a novel. The chronotope is the place where the knots of narrative are tied and untied. It can be said without qualification that to them belongs the meaning that shapes narrative. (1981, p.250)

Time and space may be given different weighting: J. R. Rowling has chosen to organise her Harry Potter books around a centre in which the space element (the representation in descriptions of suburbs, attitudes and language of an ironically stereotypical English social class) is clearly defined from the first few lines but in which the time element is vague:

Mr and Mrs Dursley, of number four, Privet Drive, were proud to say that they were perfectly normal, thank you very much. They were the last people you'd

expect to be involved in anything strange and mysterious, because they just didn't hold with such nonsense. (1997 p.7)

Bakhtin stressed the living impulses behind words (*napravlennost*), and the way that language is *dialogical, heteroglossic*, multivoiced, intertextual, and intonated with the usages of *the ordinary and the everyday*. Further, he noted that the language of literature is at the same time not only marked by the *presentness* of each moment but also, potentially, by the perspectives of centuries, a concept he called *great time* (1986, p.84). That is, narrative time space is both a series of moments of presentness that contain specific meanings which are absolutely contained within that particular fusion of time and space (cultural, social, historical, who is present, who is speaking and listening, how they feel towards each other, what has just happened, time of day, weather and so on), and, simultaneously, an accumulation of meanings that go far beyond specific presentness, and include the past utterances of others.

The appropriation of the chronotope in literature provides, in Holquist's words, 'an optic for reading texts as x-rays of the forces at work in the culture system from which they spring' (1981 pp.425-427). It helps us to read beyond the traditional idea of 'setting' and to rethink narrative time-space as essentially ideological, that is, as subjective, changeable, multiple and dependent on the position of the observer.

My research extends this idea into the notion of a *visual chronotope* (Johnston 2000), that is, the representation of time-space in picture book art and illustration. Like Bakhtin's original concept, a visual chronotope reflects ideological choices; what is selected to illustrate time-space will reflect personal and social values and attitudes. A clock on the space of a wall is a clear time marker, but its repeated presence with different times (particularly short intervals) may also reflect urban pressures and stress.

Reading a picture book is a complex process, because the child must read both words and pictures. The pictures of modern picturebooks can amplify, interrogate or even contradict the verbal text, and it is through this complicated interaction of verbal and visual literacies that the child makes meaning. The famous little picture book, *Rosie's Walk*, consists of one sentence that never mentions the presence of the fox, whose exploits dominate the illustrations. Verbal and visual chronotopes are each *abricolage* - selected bits and pieces - and in their interaction can create a complex mixture of both presentness and 'great time' that becomes part of the deep structure of the text.

One of the chronotopes Bakhtin discusses is the *intervalic chronotope*, where as part of the narrative two different perspectives of time and space play out against each other, and action is perceived from two different chronotopical perspectives, which both 'take on metaphoric significance' (1981, p.165). This describes particularly well the wonderful book by Thomas and Anna-Clara Tidholm, *Resan Till Ugri-La-Brek* (1995) where the child protagonists go searching for their dead grandfather, across the football field, through the snowy forest, through the desert, across a beach, right to the other side of the world into an icy land, where they find and talk with him, and then return home. The intervalic chronotope reveals that all this has happened during play in their yard; their parents are glimpsed on the balcony as the children make their campfire, and are clearly seen having afternoon coffee on the children's 'return.'

Another type of chronotope is the *adventure novel of everyday life*, where time-space is organised as 'a new type of adventure time' that is a 'special sort of everyday time' (1981 p. 111). Here the emphasis is not on two perspectives of time and space being quite different but rather on a perspective of time-space - and life itself - as being simultaneously, within the one chronotope, both critically personal and individual, and *just as critically* something which

reaches beyond individual experience, and imbues individual experience with further significance. This is a notion of time that draws past and future into the experience of the present moment, but with an inclination towards change. The adventure novel of everyday life is a temporal sequence of 'metamorphosis' or 'transformation' which is linked with 'identity' as part of an 'idea of development' (1981 p.113); it presents moments of 'crisis' - that is, critical points of a development that 'unfolds not so much in a straight line as spasmodically, a line with "knots" in it' (p.113). In this chronotope 'there are as a rule only two images of an individual' (p.115) - a sort of 'before' and 'after' that are both 'separated and reunited through crisis and rebirth' (p.115).

The novel used as a model for the discussion of this chronotope is Apuleius' *The Golden Ass*, but I want to apply it to a recent Australian text, *Hello Baby*, by Jenni Overend and Julie Vivas (1999). This tells the story of a home birth (particularly apt in relation to the 'rebirth' idea). It is focalised through the eyes of Jack, the third child and youngest sibling. The verbal text is clearly organised by the chronological time-space of the labour - time is part of the structure of events. It locates the time-space of these events as being near a 'town' more rural than urban (a neighbour drops off 'a load of wood' as 'a present for the baby'), and reasonably contemporary: the midwife brings 'oxygen' and 'a special microphone for listening to the baby's heart'; there is a 'phone'; and the family has 'sleeping bags'. The illustrations of the visual text depict clothes of an indeterminately modern period, and a similarly indeterminate house; the pictures of preparations for the birth imply rather than detail window, chair and table. The first of the two illustrations of the scene outside the house shows a water tank and a wind-blurred forest of tall trees (both reinforcing the rural impression); the second depicts part of a house and a woodheap, with Jack (the narrator) and his father collecting wood.

This is a clearly a critical incident, 'a knot', in the life of the mother, the family, and the child about to be born, concentrated around the moment of birth, which becomes the threshold of the 'before' and 'after.' Nothing will be the same again for any of them - and cutting (and knotting) the cord is both end and beginning. However, it is also an everyday moment - babies are born, many of them at home, all the time.

Of course, in traditional terms and without using the idea of a chronotope, critics can note that the wildness outside operates as a Shakespearean-type macrocosm to the microcosm or minicontext of this baby's birth, that the illustration of the forest, and the tall (even phallic) trees dwarfing the small figure of the pregnant woman walking against the pressure of the wind evokes clear intertextual associations to the forests of folk and fairytale - enchanted woods that keep out or keep in. In the Australian context, we could also note that it accesses the idea of the bush (or desert or other wild place) as a space for healing and redemption, of gathering together physical and emotional resources. All of this however, does not quite explain the power of this text.

However, if we apply the idea of a visual chronotope, and in particular an amended idea of a visual chronotope of the *adventure time of everyday life*, it becomes possible to describe the literary process that gives *Hello Baby* its impact. We enter the text *in medias*: 'We've been waiting a long time for this day, Mum, Dad, Bea, Janie and me.' Preparations have started. This sense of an elongated period of waiting refers both back and forward, but the verbal text is telling a predictable story of a special but far from unusual occurrence. However, the visual chronotope works from the beginning to interrogate conceptions of present as being able to hold the whole story, and pushes time beyond the everyday into a sense of adventure time, and even of a folkloric conception of time that contains a sense of 'time's fullness.' Jack, the previous baby, holding up the jumpsuit on the title page, invites the reader-viewer to engage with not only the comparative smallness of the coming baby, and the transformational process of his own growing, but also the sure knowledge that this baby

yet to be born will similarly transform and outgrow the space of this moment. The swirl of preparations for birth become increasingly focused on the figures and their relationships which are made visual in the representation of touch, overlap and interconnection; the space surrounding them is little more most of the time than a pinkish-red glow. Later, as they sleep around the fire after the baby's birth, in a visual image that is almost tribal, the background space becomes darker and the fire, implicated, gives a golden light.

That the visual chronotope has few space markers reaches the moment of climax in the picture of the newly born baby on the white page, thrust into present and the cord its only connection to the moment before. In a sense, this baby has become Every Baby, just as the illustration immediately following is another version of the iconic Madonna and Child. The next double page spread places the baby in the world, the aerial perspective allows his face to become the central focus and directs his gaze beyond the page; it also allows the reader-viewer to see the 'beautiful' placenta, the life-giving sustenance that as life begins is no longer necessary.

*A is for Aunty* by Elaine Russell (2000) provides another example. This takes the traditional form of the alphabet book but it is in fact deeply autobiographical; Russell uses the sequential letters of the alphabet to give narrative shape to her memories of an indigenous childhood. In the words of the text, people and events are related to time and space through the normal chronology of the narrator's lifetime: 'The mission where I lived as a child was like a small suburb outside the main town, in the bush near a river.'

Each letter of the alphabet stimulates a memory of the past:

I is for Inspection Day. The manager's wife visited each house on the mission to make sure our homes were clean and tidy - which they were!

So the past which is clearly expressed in words is the remembered past of an older person looking back, the past of an individual lifetime, but this does not fully explain the impact of the book. However, if we bring the concept of a visual chronotope into play, and consider how the people and events are drawn in relation to time and space in the *pictures* of the text, it is clear that the visual chronotope of this story reaches into a past that is beyond that of an individual lifetime. The past expressed in the illustrations is unbound by the restrictions of a normal lifespan; it is a dense cultural past/present that could be called a type of Dreaming chronotope. The pictures construct multiple references - to totemic figures, to the circles of sites, camps, waterholes, campfires. The roads present an imagery of paths and movement, while the river that dominates most of the illustrations reminds us of Water Dreamings, and/or of a snake or Rainbow serpent - of a type of genesis, life-giving and connecting.

In prose (without its pictures), this is a twentieth century story told in a warm but matter-of-fact way; it is a charming story of random memories, with a deep but not bitter subtext implicating sociocultural attitudes, practices and policies in relation to indigenous people. In pictures (without its prose), this is a story that in depicting a 'modern' Australia reaches back into an Australia before white settlement. In the form of a picturebook, with both prose and pictures carrying narrative and coming together in story, the visual chronotope amplifies the verbal chronotope to something beyond an individual experience. This does not devalue that individual life experience; it enriches it. The relationship of people to the time-spaces of the illustrations is different to the relationship of people to the time-spaces of the verbal narrative, and the effect of this difference is to transpose *A is for Aunty* into a different cultural dimension.

The characters in these books are conceptualised both as *present* and *potential* within a sense of *great time* - a perspective beyond themselves, a sense of the possibility of

becoming other than they were. The optic of the chronotope provides a means of describing this process. Children's literature is not simple but complex; it is part of a literature continuum that addresses abstract ideas and existential issues, including as we have seen birth and death. Imaginative possibilities express hope, and these particular texts are characterised by what we could call an *ethics of hope*. Indeed, it is time to consider the integrity of the images of childhood and adolescence that some media texts offer their readers/viewers, particularly if we believe that it is through these images that children see themselves. The concept of the chronotope offers a tool of visualisation that shifts understanding beyond ideas of traditional modalities and rigorous reality into a metacognitive appreciation of multiple realities and imaginative freedoms.

So, to conclude: children's books such as these sustain by offering overt and unashamed images of growth and becoming, of questioning, and of the significance of family, love and relationship. These are not images of perfection; Russell's text implies government policies that threatened families, the Swedish text implies parents who weren't wise enough to tell the children that their grandfather had died. However, these texts worldviews that recognise perspectives beyond our own, what Bakhtin called something 'greater than me in me.'

This has been a discussion of children's books, but I believe that it also gives an interpretive framework to a social movement that in popular culture is reflected in ideas of connectedness and consilience, that is reaching beyond postmodernism into a new cosmic era that recognises and celebrates as a centre beyond ourselves the time-spaces and perspectives of centuries. This new era of Great Time was reflected in the Opening Ceremony of the Sydney Olympics; it is also an expression of a sense of commitment to global citizenship.

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