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# Interpreting the images in a picture book: Students make connections to themselves, their lives and experiences

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# Interpreting the images in a picture book: Students make connections to themselves, their lives and experiences

## **Abstract**

Picture books are an important and accessible form of visual art for children because they offer, among other things, opportunities for making connections to personal experiences and to the values and beliefs of families and communities. This paper reports on the use of a picture book to promote Year 4 students' making of text-to-self connections, which they expressed through visual art. A funds of knowledge (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992) lens was used to analyse the representation of students' out-of-school lives and experiences within the artworks. In this paper, we argue for a pedagogical approach that creates opportunities for children to respond to picture books through visual art, identifying artworks as powerful avenues of insight into children's funds of knowledge that can inform literacy pedagogy.

## **Keywords**

themselves, their, lives, experiences, interpreting, picture, images, book, students, make, connections

## **Disciplines**

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## **Interpreting the images in a picture book: Students make connections to themselves, their lives and experiences**

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*ABSTRACT: Picture books are an important and accessible form of visual art for children because they offer, among other things, opportunities for making connections to personal experiences and to the values and beliefs of families and communities. This paper reports on the use of a picture book to promote Year 4 students' making of text-to-self connections, which they expressed through visual art. A funds of knowledge (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992) lens was used to analyse the representation of students' out-of-school lives and experiences within the artworks. In this paper, we argue for a pedagogical approach that creates opportunities for children to respond to picture books through visual art, identifying artworks as powerful avenues of insight into children's funds of knowledge that can inform literacy pedagogy.*

*KEYWORDS: Children's literature, funds of knowledge, children's picture books, elementary school, responding through visual art, literature circles.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

It is well established that pedagogies drawing and building on students' funds of knowledge (FoK) (Moll, Amanti, Neff & Gonzalez, 1992), can create an inclusive environment that promotes improved learning outcomes (Moje, Ciechanowski, Kramer, Ellis & Collazo, 2004; Moll, Soto-Santiago & Schwartz, 2013). This paper considers how teachers might gain insight into students' FoK to inform their planning. Related research informing the design of this study includes Riojas-Cortez' (2001) examination of the FoK evident during socio-dramatic play in a prior-to-school setting as well as Barton and Tan's (2009) research using focus group interviews to investigate their adolescent students' FoK about food and food practices to inform planning for science tasks. Further, the on-going work of Pahl (2007) and Pahl and Kelly (2005) is of interest with its use of children's drawings to examine connections between community, home and school literacies.

Through a FoK theoretical lens (Moll et al., 1992), we can examine students' text-to-self connections (Keene & Zimmerman, 1997; Morrison & Wlodarczyk, 2009) when responding to images in quality children's literature with their own works of art. Students' independently created artworks can provide a window into their understanding of a text, their self-perceptions, communities and the broader world. Moll and colleagues (1992) observe, "there is much teachers do not know about their students or their families that could be immediately helpful in the classroom" (p. 136). And further, that teachers are ultimately "the bridge between" school FoK and those in practice in the home (p. 82). In this paper we consider how the use of quality children's literature, the picture book, *Mirror* (Baker, 2010), supported the making of

text-to-self connections expressed in students' personal artworks. We argue that these artworks offer opportunities for teachers to develop understandings about their students that can lead to informed pedagogical approaches that build on existing knowledge and life values (Gonzalez, Moll & Amanti, 2005; Hogg, 2011).

We take Moll and colleagues' (1992) understanding of FoK as the historically developed and accumulated strategies (e.g., skills, abilities, ideas and practices) or bodies of knowledge essential to an individual's functioning and wellbeing in their unique family and household. FoK are the inherent cultural resources of a community grounded in the networking they do to make best use of those resources (Conner, 2010). Teachers' understanding of students' FoK can support classroom learning (Hogg, 2011), forge links between parents, community, educators and students (Gonzalez et al., 2005) and empower families to feel included and able to contribute to school-based education. However, Moje and colleagues (2004) observe that children will not necessarily spontaneously share FoK in classrooms, meaning invitations or the creation of overt purposes for sharing may be required. Teachers can explore students' FoK in many ways, but in this study we examined the opportunities for sharing FoK as students engage with children's literature.

Quality children's literature is considered an art-form through its combination of carefully crafted language, expressive images and sensitive design (Keifer, 2008). Gibson and Ewing (2011) define quality children's literature as texts that evoke sustained engagement and emotional response, invite interpretation of multiple layers of meaning, contain expressive language and images that build on the story beyond the print and make connections to topics, themes and issues considered common among people. Many examples of quality children's literature are picture books. It is through the picture book art-form that the child reader continues to develop assumptions about the world and its people (Albers, 2009) and an understanding about their place within it (Driggs Wolfenbarger & Sipe, 2007).

It is well documented that the interaction between word and image in picture books creates a supportive meaning-making environment for child readers. For example, Coulthard (2003) observes that the presence of images creates equality in terms of the access children have, regardless of different decoding abilities or cultural backgrounds. Further, Arizpe and Styles (2003) note that some students considered by their teachers as "struggling readers" are in fact "more experienced and articulate interpreters of the visual" (p. 71) and therefore successful in understanding the story. Indeed, the combination of words and images, while complex and sophisticated (Pantaleo, 2005), is observed to create a synergy that supports the reader to achieve a new level of understanding that is "more than the sum of its parts" (Driggs Wolfenbarger & Sipe, 2007, p. 273).

However, the demands on the reader change when one mode is removed (or reduced), as is the case in wordless (or mostly wordless) picture books. These texts represent an interesting art-form because of the space they create for personal interpretation and response. Arizpe (2013) observes that reading a wordless picture book requires active participation involving risk-taking, intertextual and cultural understanding and the "ability to make sense of" the story using images alone (p. 170). In making meaning from wordless picture books, then, the reader may require extended time for engagement, reading and reflection (Arizpe, 2013) along with opportunities to

respond through a range of modes (Albers & Murphy, 2000; Harste, 2013; Short, Kauffman & Kahn, 2000).

Gibson and Ewing (2011) argue that engaging with the arts affords the making of real-world connections to personal experiences as well as to assumptions about events and happenings beyond the reader's experience. In the case of picture books, Keifer (2008) observes that readers are engaged intellectually and emotionally, provoking imagination and exploration of the human condition. Of course, the interpretations and responses of each reader are different because of the experiences, beliefs and expectations they bring to a text. That is, the viewer's individual FoK interact with the text, producing unique understandings. If educators are to understand and respond to these differences, they must consider ways to draw out and observe them in the classroom.

Traditional school-based expectations for expressing understanding through print constrain avenues for expression and potentially present as a mismatch with the freedom of expression many students enjoy outside school (Harste & Burke, 2014; Short et al., 2000). Furthermore, the creation of artworks is acknowledged as providing powerful insights into students' understandings of and connection to text. Genishi and Dyson (2009) observe that children need "time to play, to draw, to talk, to hear stories and to tell their own across multiple media" (p. 85). Indeed, Frey (1985) argues that responding to literature through visual art is not only the easiest symbolic form for children to grasp but also a fundamental act of imagining.

In terms of reading comprehension, Pantaleo (2005) argues that providing opportunities for children to respond by drawing and talking about their pictures will support their understanding. Hayik (2011) similarly promotes this approach as offering teachers "insights into students' understandings of texts" (p. 95). However, to move toward achieving a personal response requires an environment that inspires the making of text-to-self connections (Morrison & Wlodarczyk, 2009). An invitation that prompts students to consider the links between a text and their own lives can offer teachers opportunities for pedagogical changes in response to their deepened understanding of their students' FoK (Moll et al., 2013). It is the creation of visual artworks in response to the invitation to make text-to-self connections and how teachers might respond to this knowledge that is the focus of this study.

Consequently, we planned a literacy experience that created space for students to make text-to-self connections through visual art as they engaged with a picture book. The literacy experience was embedded in a common small-group reading episode, the literature circle (Daniels, 2002). Literature circles provide opportunities for meaningful discussions (Evans, 2001) and even "grand conversations" (Eeds & Wells, 1989, p. 26) that can support the making of text-to-self connections as members critique author craft, character and plot development and identify connections or tensions between the text and the readers' experiences (King, 2001; Mills & Jennings, 2011). They offer opportunity for readers to consider the social and cultural practices of themselves and others. The literature circle afforded a focus in this study on the making of meaning within the text and then on students' personal experiences. Chambers' (1993) "Tell Me" framework informed the design of the learning experience to facilitate this focus on FoK. Bromley (2001) argues that "Tell Me" prompts act as invitations for students to respond to text, because they replace closed

or interrogative questions that can generate literal answers. “Tell Me” prompts also reduce evaluative responses by adults as children articulate their understanding (Ryan & Anstey, 2003).

With a focus on engaging students as both viewers and creators of visual artworks, we selected a picture book recognised for its artistic value, *Mirror* by Jeannie Baker (2010). Baker’s picture books are internationally renowned and well respected as quality literature and art-forms. Her award-winning texts are popular with teachers, librarians, children and parents. The intricate collages capture the imagination and the limited print invites personal responses and interpretations of meaning. *Mirror* is of particular interest here with its dual perspective on family life and cultural practices. The stories of Western and Moroccan families offer both insight into the FoK of those characters’ lives and opportunities for the reader to make connections to their own families, communities, networks and practices.

*Mirror* conveys the perspectives of two families through collage. One family lives in Australia and one in Morocco and each engage in “regular” daily routines such as sharing meals and shopping. Its unique format invites readers to view the stories simultaneously. The left side depicts the Australian story and is introduced in English. These characters live in a highly urbanised, inner-city suburb in the coastal metropolis of Sydney. Their house appears to be undergoing an interior renovation throughout the book. The right side, introduced in Arabic illustrates the Moroccan story. These characters are set in remote rural Morocco. Dressed in djellaba (hooded kaftans), they convey a traditional lifestyle.

*Mirror* is essentially two picture books inside one cover and joined at the spine. It comprises two sets of three, single print-based pages forming the peritextual content. The first of these instructs: “The Western and Moroccan stories in this book are designed to be read side by side”. That is, when the left side opens to the first page of the Australian story, the right opens to the Moroccan story, and so on through the book. The story contains two initial sets of single-image pages, followed by two sets of eight, double-page collages containing multiple images. To introduce her story, Baker (2010) suggests that despite the observable differences between the families and their cultures, they are fundamentally the same. She connects with her own experience to explain her view:

...travelling alone in remote Morocco, a woman “stranger” myself, I was met with much friendliness and generosity from “strangers”...Like each other we live to be loved by family and friends, and be part of a larger family, a community. (final page)

She concludes: “inwardly we are so alike, it could be each other we see when we look in a mirror”, perhaps revealing something of her own values and beliefs about the world. As she brings her own FoK to the creation of *Mirror*, Baker appears to promote her story as representational of the universal similarities that exist between families and cultures. In this study, we are interested in facilitating the sharing of students’ personal understandings and lived experiences through the artworks they create in response to *Mirror*.

## METHODOLOGY

This study was guided by the research questions:

- What text-to-self connections do children make between the almost wordless picture book *Mirror* and their own funds of knowledge through their visual art creations?
- How might teachers use classroom literature circle to access students' funds of knowledge?

The participants were three cohorts of Year 4 students (aged 9-10 years) in Australian primary schools. The New South Wales Board of Studies (2012) recommends *Mirror* from Grade 1 in primary school to Year 10 in secondary school. Year 4 students sit approximately midway on this continuum, making them a suitable cohort for study. All participating schools were located in a multicultural coastal area south of Sydney, New South Wales. Table 1 summarises the participants (pseudonyms) and their contexts during the study.

<b>School 1:</b> Shreya      Kyaw Yaminn      Levie Joshua      Nyein	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Located in a suburb of low, socio-economic status</li> <li>• A growing refugee population in the suburb has increased the diversity of student population</li> <li>• Participants: two boys, four girls (five Burmese, one from Democratic Republic of the Congo), all of whom moved to Australia in the previous 4 years.</li> </ul>
<b>School 2:</b> Jalil          Goran Asad          Ruby Vlaho        April	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Located in a suburb of low, socioeconomic multicultural status</li> <li>• Many students at the school are bilingual, including 5 of these participants.</li> <li>• Participants: four boys, two girls (Indigenous, Lebanese, Macedonian and Serbian backgrounds), all of whom were born in Australia</li> </ul>
<b>School 3:</b> Peter          Cherise Saul          Rebecca	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Located in a suburb of mid-high, socio-economic status</li> <li>• Mostly native English speaking population</li> <li>• Participants: two boys, two girls (native English speakers)</li> </ul>

**Table 1. Summary of participants and research sites**

Three consecutive interactions with each school group allowed extended reading time with *Mirror*, both to consider its messages and to make personal connections. Each student kept an individual copy of *Mirror* during the study that was then donated to the libraries of each school. The same protocols were followed in each school during literature circle time:

- **Interaction 1:** Students read *Mirror* independently, both individually and in pairs. Next, using Chambers' (1993) "Tell Me" frame, students were invited to share interpretations of and personal connections to *Mirror* (approx. 45 minutes). The independent visual arts task for interaction two was introduced.
- **Interaction 2:** Students retained and engaged independently with *Mirror* over one week, creating personal responses to something they related to in the text. They wrote an accompanying piece describing the text-to-self connection/s

they made to *Mirror* through their artwork and prepared to share these during interaction three.

- **Interaction 3:** Researchers and students regrouped 7-10 days after interaction one to share text-to-self connections and to undertake further exploration of *Mirror*, again guided by Chambers' (1993) frame (approx. 45 minutes).

Chambers' (1993) "Tell Me" prompts were designed to focus the students' attention on their interpretations of the plot in *Mirror* and then to their personal connections to the stories. The framework is well respected and acknowledged as a tool that creates space for conversation rather than interrogation about reading (Bromley, 2001; Ryan & Anstey, 2003). Examples of "Tell Me" prompts in this study included:

Tell me about anything you liked or disliked about this book.

- What especially caught your attention?

Tell me about anything that puzzled you.

- Are there any questions you would like to ask?
- Was there anything that took you by surprise?

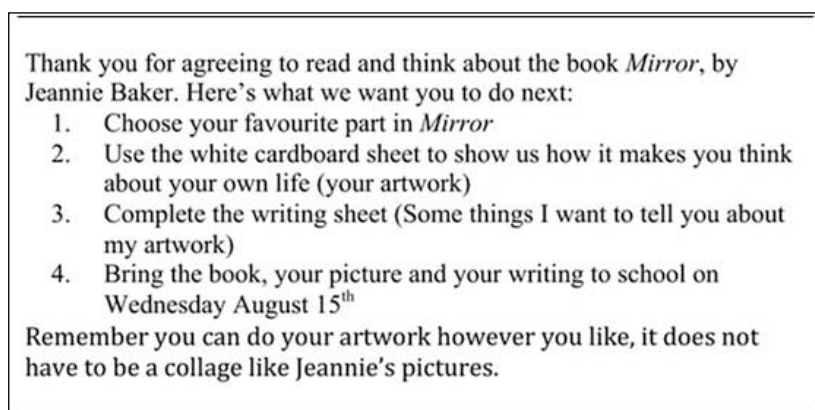
Tell me about the patterns, about the connections you noticed in these stories.

Has anything that happens in this book happened to you?

- Tell me about the ways was it the same or different for you.
- Which parts seem to be the most true to life? Are there parts that are not believable for you?
- Did the book make you think differently about your own experiences?

Did this story leave you with any questions about your own experiences, or of others?

The focus of this paper is on students' interpretations and artworks from interaction two and explanations of their text-to-self connections shared at the beginning of interaction three. Interaction two was an independent task, explained orally and summarised on a task card (Figure 1).



**Figure 1. Task Card**

The task was completed at home and during class time as facilitated by class teachers. Participants retained an independent task package for the week containing: *Mirror*, task card, stiff blank A4 paper and a writing sheet. The students were asked to "choose your favourite part in *Mirror* and show how that part makes you think about your own life" and to explain those connections on the writing sheet. Of the 16 participants, 15 created and shared artworks and their text-to-self connections. Three



participants created two artworks each and one did not complete the task, totalling 18 submissions.

Data from interaction two comprised artworks and accompanying written responses, transcripts from sharing artworks and text-to-self connections, and observations recorded as field notes. A FoK frame afforded an examination of the “funds” shared, such as personal experiences and interests, traditions and beliefs, networks, practices, tools and texts (Hogg, 2011; Moje et al., 2004; Moll et al., 1992). Therefore, initial analysis began with an artwork, focused on identifying the different funds revealed, for example, a personal interest, a particular ability or an established practice. This first level of analysis was repeated for all data sources in order to triangulate the emerging findings.

The FoK frame also supported a second level of analysis, examining lifeworld sources of this knowledge such as family groups, peers, home, the community (including school), and popular culture (Andrews & Yee, 2006; Moje et al., 2004; Moll et al., 2013; Riojas-Cortez, 2001). In her study, Riojas-Cortez (2001) noted the importance of allowing categories to emerge from analysis rather than being preconceived, an approach adopted in this study. Table 2 is an example of analysis of an excerpt, where Rebecca explained her artwork to her peers and the researchers.

Data from Rebecca	Funds shared	Lifeworld source
<p><b>Verbal explanation (transcript)</b> I used the Australian side. [Shows the page]. I chose that ‘coz I’m really interested in drawing. I really like that. When I do my colours I’m really messy as well...but I always like to show my mum and dad.</p>	<p><b>Identity</b> – an artist of natural settings, although somewhat self-deprecating <b>Practices</b> – drawing and sharing artworks with significant others <b>Networks</b> – the boy in the story provides another example of an artist “like her”. Parents appear to be an appreciative audience</p>	<p><b>Family</b> – has access and opportunity to draw and appears to be valued as an artist by her parents  <b>Peers</b> – the character (of similar age) in <i>Mirror</i> appears to connect with her artist identity</p>

**Table 2. Example of data analysis using FoK frame**

Of the 18 submissions, three categories of response were identified: personal interests; family practices and identity; and accessing community resources. Half of the submissions (9 of 18) made connections to personal interests; one third (6 of 18) related to practices within the family and identity; and the remaining three were related to the accessing of community resources, specifically shopping. In some cases, overlap between the categories was evident, for example, one artwork depicted a trip to the markets with parents. Whilst there are family practices evident, it was the purchase of goods that the student identified in written and verbal data as the text-to-self connection, therefore, it was categorised primarily as a story about accessing the resources within the community. The observable overlap within and across fund and source categories points not only to the complexity of students’ FoK, but also to the benefits for students when teachers acknowledge and incorporate a range of perspectives of FoK into daily practice.

The students identified pages in *Mirror* to which they made text-to-self connections and subsequently created artworks. Of the ten double pages included in each of Baker's stories, the students identified three. The pages in *Mirror* are not numbered, so they have been named for the purposes of this paper. The largest group (9 of 18 submissions) identified *travelling home*, the eighth double-page spread, as one that evoked text-to-self connections. The second (6 of 18 submissions) was *back at home*, the tenth double-page spread in the story. And finally, three students identified *at the market*, the sixth page as one that prompted text-to-self connections. The two larger groups' responses are explicated in this paper.

### “Travelling home”

In *Mirror*, *travelling home* depicts each family's passage home from a shopping trip. On the left, two collages capture the scene. Viewed from the left, the first is larger than the second. In the larger collage, the man and boy sit in their car at traffic lights on a busy three-lane street. The boy waves to another as he crosses at the pedestrian crossing. This second boy wears an orange t-shirt with “tigers” (the name of a local Rugby League football team) emblazoned in black. This orange and black or “tigers” theme is continued throughout this Western scene. For example, at the lights is an airbrushed car (a method of spray painting graphics and text<sup>1</sup> on hard surfaces) in orange and black paint with “tigers” inscribed on the doors. On the footpath an adult male and his small dog wear orange jumpers with black print, “grand final” for the man and “tigers” for the dog. This man even has orange hair. In the smaller collage, the male characters have returned home to unpack their purchases: planks of wood, a flower and a Moroccan rug.

On the right, capturing the journey of the Moroccan characters is a single collage. It is extraordinary in its contrast to the Western story. The man and boy are the sole travellers in what Baker identifies as the Valley of Roses. They travel by donkey between the banks of the river and several crops of what appear to be African roses. The landscape is vast, sparsely populated and apparently arid beyond the valley. A shepherd is seen herding sheep and a lone woman is bent over working a crop. Incongruously, three boys play soccer. One wears a shirt bearing the “Nike” brand name and logo. The donkey carries the day's purchases: a computer in a large box and other supplies in a saddlebag.

The *travelling home* pages acted for the students as a catalyst for connections to their personal, non-school interests and popular culture. The students connected to family and community as they shared their interests and practices in connection with *Mirror*. Specifically, these included both playing and watching sport (in five submissions), riding horses or bikes (four submissions) and one to the specialised pastime of airbrushing. For example, Asad responded to the Western page with a collage of texts, magazine images and 3D materials conveying his preference for Rugby League football. A well-known Rugby League footballer, Benji Marshall, is drawn wearing the orange and black West Tigers uniform on the football field on a sunny day. Under his left arm rests a football and, with a broad smile, his gaze engages the viewer. To Benji's left are the goal posts and behind him, the crowd. These people, cut from magazines, are positioned behind a fence created from wooden kebab sticks and green

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<sup>1</sup> See <http://www.texta.com.au/>

tape. Members of the crowd, all adults, hold assorted placards supporting the Tigers. Revealed in Asad's explanatory text are his own loyalties and also those of a close family member. He wrote,

My picture it is like Wests Tigers. But the thing is I don't go for Tigers, I go for Dragons. But my Uncle Ekram does...His favourite player is Benji Marshall (a former Tigers player).



Figure 2. Asad's artwork

Similarly, Goran connected to *Mirror* through sport, but his motivation comes from the Moroccan side and playing soccer. Goran used pencil and crayon to create his depiction of a shot on goal. A striker in red with his back to the viewer is positioned in front of the goal. The striker is imagining a shot where the ball travels through the air and into the top left corner of the goal. A thought bubble emanates from the striker's head, "WANT A GOAL". Facing the viewer in a yellow uniform is the goalkeeper. Goran has drawn this player flinging his body to the right, arms stretched high in an (unsuccessful) attempt to block the goal. It appears Goran will get his wish.



Figure 3. Goran's artwork

In his response, Saul appropriated Baker's collage style by including a series of smaller images alongside larger ones. In his artwork, Saul creates a frame inside the page using pop sticks and glue. He uses four more pop sticks to make Australian Rules Football (AFL) goal posts and pieces of real grass inside the frame to create the field. A photo of himself right of centre, dressed in his Australian Rules Football uniform, shows him preparing to kick the football. Interestingly, his gaze is to the viewer rather than the goal posts. Surrounding the field (outside of the pop stick border) are 16 smaller pencil drawings making a wider border containing what Saul describes as "things I like to do".



**Figure 4. Saul's artwork**

In all the boys' creations, their engagement with popular culture is evident in the support of their preferred football codes, for Goran and Saul as players and Asad as observer. But more than that, we are shown something of Asad's extended family network and his connection to his Uncle. Further, Goran shares his ambitions as a soccer player and Saul is generous in sharing with the viewer a selection of his food preferences, indoor and outdoor interests and activities.



**Figure 5. April's artwork**

Other responses to the Moroccan story relate to the man and boy on the donkey. Three submissions identified a personal love of horses. April included a photo of herself on her horse clearing a jump, as well as a larger, cut-out image of another horse. She exclaims in her written text, "I love horses and donkeys are related. I love to horse ride!" Rebecca explained, "As you can see in my picture, it is on a farm with a horse (my favourite animal)...it is not my best picture of a horse but I think I did OK". There is an obvious interest in horses from both girls, and April's comparison to donkeys suggests she is something of an expert on a range of equine animals.

### **"Back at home"**

In *Mirror*, the *back at home* double-page spread is the tenth. It comprises a single collage for each story and depicts each family in their homes engaging with their purchases from the day. On the left, the Western family gathers at home on their recently purchased Moroccan carpet in front of the newly finished fireplace complete with glowing fire. The bodies of each member face inward as they engage with a drawing apparently created by the boy. All eyes are focused on him and his artwork showing his family flying on the carpet over an imaginary scene using the naïve painting style to depict a blue sky, pink mountains, palm trees, a camel and a white bird. What appears to be a single African Rose sits in a vase on the mantelpiece.

Similarly, the Moroccan family is depicted together in the final scene. However, they are arranged in a single line, all facing the computer and none of them facing each other as the boy operates the keyboard. The man and an older male are also close to the computer, within touching distance of each other, of the boy and the keyboard. The women are furthest away. One holds the baby and two older women sit in front of the window holding tea and what appear to be prayer beads. These older women are physically aligned with symbols of traditional Moroccan culture such as the urn and prayer rug on the windowsill.

In response to the *back at home* pages, the students connected to family and community practices and their identities within their homes (two submissions), with their siblings (three submissions), parents (one submission) and extended family (one submission).

For example, Jalil's submission depicted his lounge room and, while it appears to relate to the Western story in its modern design, he indicated that he responded to the technology present in the Moroccan scene. Jalil created his image using texta. He is drawn standing alone in the centre of the room, quite tall, with arms and legs spread wide, perhaps to demonstrate his sense of ownership of this room. Jalil's face conveys a wide smile, while in his left hand he holds an iPod touch. He explains,

First off, you can see me and all the other things in my lounge room. Here is a nice table with a bowl of flowers in it. Two windows with the sun outside. Also my couch with two cushions on it. My TV with a nice stand. Also me playing my iPod touch. Then I'm about to sit and watch TV.

Jalil's sense of ownership and pride are evident both in the image and accompanying text. It is an interesting departure from the themes of togetherness apparent in Baker's book and perhaps provides some insight into the ways Jalil thinks about his home and his status within this room and even within his family.



**Figure 6. Jalil's artwork**

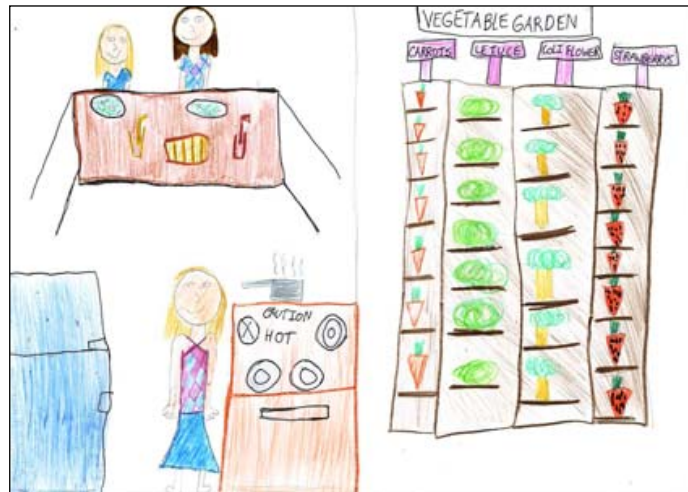
Shreya and Cherise each included other family members in their scenes. Shreya used collage and texta to recreate her lounge room, where she and her sister sit cross-legged on the lounge watching television. Shreya and her sister sit to the rear of the room with a small table holding a vase of flowers in front of the lounge and a small television with its back to the viewer. Shreya explained that, in this artwork, she and her sister are watching the English comedy, *Mr Bean's Holiday*, observing that her sister “was laughing all the way through the movie”. Like Jalil, Shreya’s creation provides insight into a valued home activity. It differs, however, in that she is a less prevalent figure in the room and is not alone, implying that this is both a shared space and a shared experience, perhaps requiring some compromise.



**Figure 7. Shreya's artwork**

Cherise’s time spent with her sister is in the kitchen and dining areas of her home. A parent, her mother, also features in the artwork. Cherise used pencil to draw and black pen to outline the images as she portrays a happy home scene. Cherise’s mother features in the foreground, standing at the stove, while she and her sister are seated further back at the table. Cherise described how she liked to “cook dinner or help

Mum cook dinner for my sister”, using the produce from their vegetable garden (the topic of her second submission). A sense of camaraderie and perhaps self-sufficiency is evident within this image, as the three “girls” each contribute to the workload of the evening meal.



**Figure 8. Cherise's artworks**

Interestingly, one submission related to siblings presents a scene of disharmony and unrest. The artwork takes a close angle on one character so the viewer sees only an extended arm holding an iPad in its hand. The much smaller figure of a girl is seen below the outstretched arm. She is labelled “Emily” and appears to have her arm and foot raised in anger. A speech bubble exclaims, “Don’t do that! Blah blah.” Another speech bubble appears on the far right of the scene indicating the owner of the arm is speaking, “Oops!” This artwork, completed all in black pen, is smaller than the other submissions and was completed on different paper from that supplied to participants. Peter shared his story orally.



Peter: That’s my sister [points to “Emily”], that’s me. I’m playing her video game and I’m killing her player and she doesn’t like it.

Researcher: So this is a fight scene?  
 Peter: Yes, in our regular day, yes.

Peter also shared that his artwork “relates to *Mirror* because of the modern technology” evident in the final page of the Moroccan side of the *back at home* scene. This is an interesting departure from Baker’s themes of togetherness, collaboration and family cohesion, as Peter conveys something of his relationship with his sister.

## DISCUSSION

The students in this study were invited during literature circle to make text-to-self connections to *Mirror* creatively through visual art, a short piece of writing and a verbal explanation about their artwork with a view to providing insight into their FoK. An almost wordless picture book like *Mirror* offers opportunities for students to make text-to-self connections (Keene & Zimmerman, 1997) because of its content and design. Further, the ambiguity of meaning created by the reduced print (Arizpe, 2013) affords a range of interpretations and understandings and the making of unique connections to FoK.

It is interesting that these participants, with their diversity in cultural and social backgrounds selected similar pages in *Mirror* for their response. The students’ artworks appeared to reveal something of their personal identities and their competence within the out of school communities with which they engage (Gonzalez et al., 2005). Whilst the views shared situated them as dependents within their family networks as sons/daughters, siblings, nieces or nephews, they also shared independent identities within community networks as footballers, horseriders and chefs. The tone and content of their artworks implied a sense of control and competence (Gonzalez et al., 2005) over the interests and activities they identified, whether it was in successfully scoring a goal or even tormenting a little sister. These students shared FoK related to personal interests and practices that indicated not only what they liked to do, but that positioned them as successful participants in those practices.

From a pedagogical stance, this study sought to elicit something of the students’ FoK (Moll et al., 1992) as they engaged with a picture book during literature circle. We argue that Chambers’ (1993) “Tell Me” frame during literature circle interactions between peers, a picture book and a teacher was a powerful pedagogical approach within which these understandings could be expressed. Further, we argue that the opportunity for literacy learning as both a viewer and creator of visual art afforded insight into students’ FoK, as they spent time both independently and with support drawing connections across home and school boundaries.

The opportunity to gain insight into students’ FoK was achieved through their reading, sharing, connecting with and responding to the picture book through visual artworks as part of literature circle. We argue that the learning was supported by Chambers’ framework because of the opportunities for conversation it created through the carefully designed prompts. As in Bromley’s (2001) and Ryan and Anstey’s (2003) examination of Chambers’ (1993) frame to support children’s comprehension of picture books, our participants’ responses to the invitation to share their interpretations provided insight into their understanding of the stories. But a further



invitation to respond by creating artworks that would demonstrate text-to-self connections afforded insight into the students' FoK. For teachers, pedagogies that include carefully crafted prompts and questions that invite rather than demand response can produce valuable understandings about their students' knowledge and competencies outside of school for inclusion in literacy pedagogies.

Like Gibson and Ewing's (2011) findings, this study revealed that the opportunity for students to engage as both viewer and creator of visual art was an important literacy experience. As viewers, the students had time and opportunity to read and view *Mirror* independently, with peers and with the researchers, as they considered the messages on offer (Arizpe, 2013). As creators of visual arts, the students demonstrated their understandings through their responses as image and text. As with the findings of Albers and Murphy (2000), Harste (2013) and Short and colleagues (2000) this study points to the value for students in being offered choices about expressing their personal connections to a piece of visual art through their own artistic abilities and preferences. The students' artworks demonstrated the ability to represent ideas and personal connections to the picture book through the practices they chose to share. While the choices for response were limited to visual art and print in this study, they were broad enough to capture something of the participants' out-of-school experiences, values and practices.

Barton and Tan (2009) call for continued exploration of teaching pedagogies that foster the expression of students' FoK to inform our teaching. Chambers' (1993) framework to support the making of text-to-self connections through viewing and creating visual art during literature circle is one such pedagogy that, in this study, provided valuable insights for future teaching. When teachers make deliberate efforts to examine what is important to their students and the ways they make sense of their daily lives (Gonzalez et al., 2005), they are empowered to make pedagogical decisions that validate their students and their communities through meaningful literacy experiences.

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