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Children's Film Viewing Practices:
A Qualitative Investigation into Engagement with a Feature Film

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education at Massey University, New Zealand

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Abstract

This study investigates the ways that children engage with a repeatedly viewed film in domestic settings. The research questions focus on the children's language, their multimodal behaviours while viewing and the understandings they form about a film. The study aims to provide insights for educators by demonstrating the range and nature of the educationally significant understandings, about film, that children construct.

An initial survey of 9 and 10 year olds produced 17 children who nominated *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets* (Columbus, 2002) as a favourite film that they had viewed at least 10 times. A video illustrating the research procedures was used to inform and to stimulate discussion with these children, to ensure that they were able to give educated consent. Observations of pairs of children viewing the film in their homes, followed by a series of activities to elicit discussion, created a set of rich data on the children's engagement practices and understandings of the film.

Framed within the interpretivist paradigm, social semiotics and a sociocultural model of learning informed the generation and analysis of the data. A viewing practices engagement framework adapted existing frameworks in literature, literacy and critical literacy to better analyse viewing behaviours, responses and understandings. The engagement practice categories (literal, connotative, aesthetic, structural and critical) enabled multimodal and transcribed verbal data to be meaningfully linked. Several analytic approaches (including multimodal analysis and discourse analysis) were used to provide a full description of viewing engagement.

The findings revealed variable levels of overt behaviour during viewing which did not relate to levels of understanding about the film. The range of understandings included aspects of characters, narrative, causation in the film and special effects. Discourse analysis revealed a range of viewing positions taken and social languages used, as well as gender differences in the balance of language used to attribute the film’s emotional effects.

The findings provide evidence that children construct a range of educationally relevant understandings through their repeated home viewing of favourites, although structural and critical engagement was not well developed in this group. The findings are relevant to children's learning, audience research and the culture of childhood. The study has implications for parents, for primary school teachers and for education policy.

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Transcription conventions

The names given throughout are the children's self-nominated pseudonyms.
The following conventions have been used:

examples of children's talk are commonly separated from running text and indented;

line numbers in transcripts are shown only where they are needed for clarity in the discussion;

a Capital letter and new line indicate a new speaker;

where children's talk is quoted within running text, single quotation marks are used;

UPPER case is used to name film characters and so indicate that the following dialogue belongs to the film;

italics are used for the researcher's utterances;

( ) parentheses are used within extracts to signify sounds which are not words (eg laughter or exclamation), or to indicate indistinct words, and at the end of quotations to enclose the source by giving the children's pseudonyms and an indication of the activity during which the talk was produced, eg (Tayla & Analeese, viewing);

[ ] square brackets convey kinesic features (facial movements or physical gestures), contextual information or explanatory notes;

" " double quotation marks indicate children saying film dialogue;

*" " asterisk and double quotation marks indicate film dialogue said by the children in unison with a character (chorusing);

' ' single quotation marks show children creating speech for characters; and

… ellipsis indicates that one or more words or speaking turns have been omitted from the transcript.

While the children's talk has not been corrected or standardised, the transcripts are punctuated to convey the meaning as clearly as possible.

Quotations of children's talk while viewing include an indication of the film's running time to the nearest complete minute, as shown on the Warner Bros DVD 23592 (Region 4).

No time is given when the period between utterances is less than two seconds; paralinguistic features (non-verbal vocalisations such as laughing or giggling, exclamations etc) are not counted as utterances in time-keeping unless they involve words.