The Theory of

Information Literacy and children's shared digital reading in a time of social distancing

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I, Katharine Jane Smales, confirm that the work presented in my thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

Abstract

This qualitative study explores the information literacy practice of children and their families via shared digital reading practices at home during social distancing. Constructivist grounded theory was used to examine the information activities of eighteen families, including twenty-five children. Innovative information-giving and consent procedures were employed, as well as video data and semi-structured interviews. These methods gave children and their families the opportunity to present an explanatory narrative and contextual information which can be difficult to explain in words. This study is informed by agential realism and practice theory. It uses the sensitising concept of paratexts to explore digitally mediated shared reading activities which are not always limited to one device.

The theory of *binding together* emerges from the study's analysis and provides a fulsome account of how engagement with information supported children's shared digital reading during a mandated isolation period. The theory illustrates how parents along with children, extended family and teachers, customised and navigated a wide range of information sources, which were mediated via shared digital reading activities to maintain connection between people at a time of isolation. Methodologically, the research contributes by employing a design which used participatory video methods with children. This raised a range of ethical hurdles relating to the collection of young children's identifying data. This was overcome by co-creating a picturebook with an illustrator and which was informed by the theoretical framework of the study. Theoretically, the study showcases the use of paratextual theory in Information Studies research, and uses a theoretical framework which offers a fresh approach to paratexts. The theory demonstrates how paratexts and the body enable and constrain information literacy and establishes how situated and contingent information is in digital settings. Lastly, it evidences how information literacy practice shapes, enables and contributes to the meaning-making of shared digital reading practices.

Impact statement

Digital technology has opened new ways for children to share books with others in domestic settings: as audio recordings; videos posted to YouTube or WhatsApp; or live-streamed. This research explored children's experiences of reading in these ways to connect with others at a time of isolation. It offers insight into the home learning environment which is key to children's intellectual and social development (Montag, *et al,* 2015; Hanson, 2017; Crew, 2020). The research provides value to librarians, educators, policymakers and parents on how positive reading experiences are constructed at home and can be used to support children's education and wellbeing.

This research evidenced children's experiences of digital settings to be uniquely tailored for them by adults, but also by their digital environments. Recognising that children's digital practices are highly personalised and individually experienced draws attention to the importance of research methods which focus on children's accounts rather than those of adults speaking on their behalf. This research showcased how innovative video methods could be employed to gather children's firsthand accounts of their unique digital experiences. These research methods are key in an area which is of great societal interest, as increasing numbers of children own devices and have online presences (Ofcom, 2023); where it is estimated that young people now spend between 6–9 hours a day on digital devices (American Academy of Child and Adolscent Psychiatry, 2024); and that this use can sometimes be problematic (van Endert, 2021; Wang *et al.*, 2023).

The use of video data placed an emphasis on the creation of innovative ethical protocols around collecting visually identifying video data of young children. This included explaining how their data would be used, kept and stored in a way which children could genuinely understand, through the creation of an illustrated picture book. This approach demonstrated and modelled how gaining ongoing consent to participate from young children could be approached in an engaging and accessible way. Explaining concepts around data collection to children is becoming increasingly important. The UK Children's Commissioner (2018) reported that the proliferation of connected

devices meant that personal data collected from people increased forty-fold between 2015 and 2020. The inclusion of the picturebook in the research design to explain both the research and the data collection has already demonstrated impact in this area. It has been presented at a conference, in a peer reviewed journal (Smales, Lloyd and Rayner, 2023) and to the Digital Data Technology Directorate at the UK Department of Education.

Theoretical positions from Publishing and Information Studies informed this study. This resulted in a new approach to the way in which paratexts (elements which frame information) can be analysed by taking a practice theory approach. Offering an alternative to close reading, this foregrounded the relational capacities of paratexts and their impact on users' reception of the text. This methodological manoeuvre is useful in relation to misinformation, particularly in online settings, where what frames information often belies its source or purpose, and where the frame often influences how that information is received by users.

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   Katharine Smales was the lead author on this paper which was supported by her two PhD supervisors who were also named authors on the paper.

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   Supervisor/ Senior Author (where appropriate)

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Dedicated to the memory of

Dr Elizabeth Stewart (1948 – 2022)

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Children's shared digital reading in the pandemic

Academic study is awash with research on adult-child shared book reading (Kucirkova and Grøver, 2022) as a result of its proven ability to improve children's reading and speaking skills (Senechal, Whissell and Bildfell, 2017), making it the 'single most important activity for reading success in both home and school settings' (Stoetzel and Shedrow, 2021 p. 747).

At the same time, children and their families have more access to digital technology at home than at any other time in history. Increasing numbers of young children read using digital formats (Marsh *et al.*, 2017; Barzillai and Thomson, 2018; Ofcom, 2015, 2019, 2022; Kucirkova and Flewitt, 2020) and use portable technology such as tablets and smartphones to support their reading skills at home (Eutsler, 2019; Kucirkova and Flewitt, 2020).

These two areas converged sharply as the Covid-19 pandemic struck and schools were closed across the world, meaning that half a billion children became dependent on virtual learning and the resources available in their homes (Sonnenschein, Stites and Ross, 2021). However, the pandemic did not affect people equally and not all families were equipped financially or materially to cope with this upheaval (OECD, 2021). As a result the attainment gap for disadvantaged children grew compared to their better off peers (EEF, 2022) and

research reports a significant decrease in adults reading with children during the pandemic (Read *et al.*, 2022; Lin *et al.*, 2023) and that also many children had limited access to books (Norrick-Rühl, 2022).

Yet this disparity extended in the other direction too. There is evidence that some families adapted and increased home literacy activities during the pandemic (Sonnenschein, Stites and Ross, 2021) and that some children may even have had literacy gains during this time (Sun *et al.*, 2021). This suggestion is supported by reports from library professionals, teachers, literacy charities and news organisations on the ways that people adopted and changed shared reading practices via digital means during a period of social distancing and isolation from family and school.

For example, there are reports of rises in the use of eBook borrowing (Soulen and Tedrow, 2023) and an increase in audiobook use (Snelling, 2021; Soulen and Tedrow, 2023). There are also instructional articles, reports and studies of how adults and children shared books during this time using digital means. These included teachers and librarians digitally recording themselves reading stories for families to download and watch at home (Fast, 2020; Bavington, 2021; Stoetzel and Shedrow, 2021), reports of teachers and librarians asking families to record and share their own storytimes (Best, 2021; Martin, 2021), teachers, librarians, booksellers and caregivers using videoconferencing tools such as Zoom or Google Meet to read to children live (Jensen, 2020; Kass, 2020; Stoetzel and Shedrow, 2021; Buchholz, Jordan and Frye, 2022; Read *et al.*, 2022; BBC report, *See Fig 1*); and teachers and communities using social media like Instagram (Davies, Lupton and Gormsen Schmidt, 2022) and WhatsApp (Chai *et al.*, 2020) to post reading activities. There is even a study which reports veterans in prison reading aloud to their children over the phone during the lockdowns (Baverstock *et al.*, 2021). Shared digital reading practices shaped by a socially distanced context are the subject of this study and framed here as information literacy

practices in order to explore and unpack their complexity. Children and their families, acting as co-researchers, provided video data and children were interviewed in order to explore their experiences at home of these shared digital reading practices.

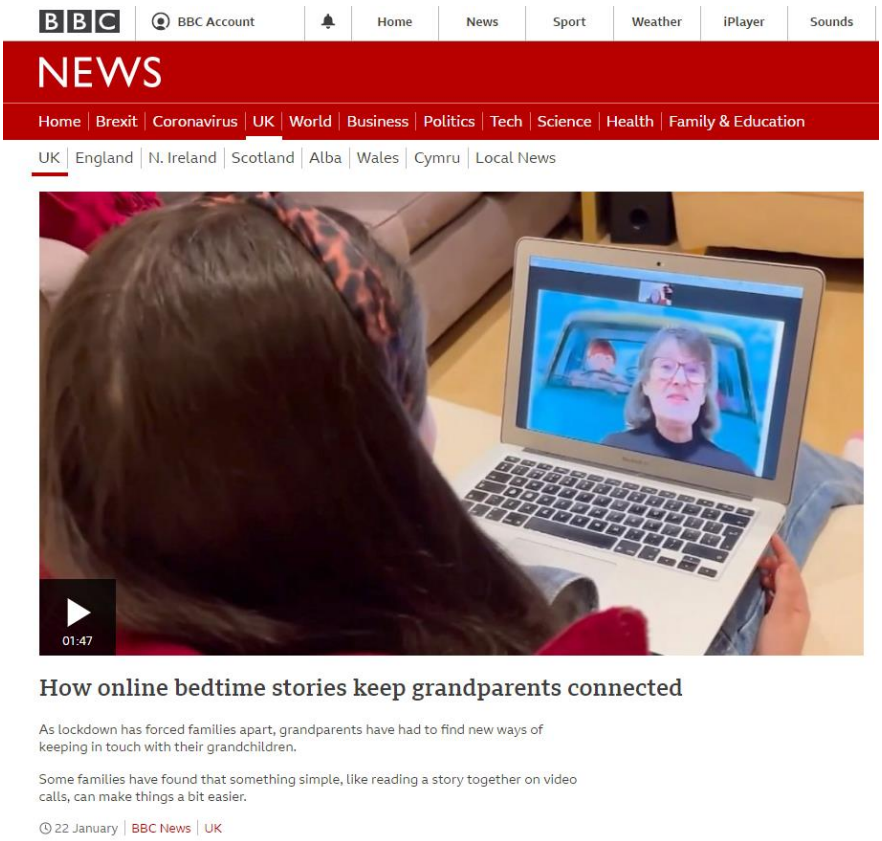


Fig. 1: BBC report on online shared reading, January 22, 2021

1.2 Aims of the Research

This study explores how young children and their families experienced information literacy practices relating to shared digital reading during a time of social distancing resulting from the Covid-19 pandemic. It does this by presenting an account which includes the opinions of children, and that widens the focus from comparisons between eBooks and physical books in order to encompass other ways of reading digitally and moves away from the study of reading outcomes and towards reading experiences. These areas are currently under-researched in the study of children's shared and digital reading. The abundance of research on

children's shared and digital reading, which ranges across a wide variety of disciplines, coalesces around three themes. Firstly, research relies heavily on the opinions of adults, including parents, teachers and librarians, but rarely including the opinions of children themselves. Yet, established scholarly work suggests that children's information practices, including shared reading, should be studied in their own right, rather than viewing children as adults-in-training (Lundh, 2011; Hedemark, 2012; Hampson Lundh, 2013). The shared nature of this type of reading requires a more holistic set of opinions from those who participate, incorporating children's views as well as those of the adults who take part. Secondly, much existing research focuses on comparing eBooks with physical books, which neglects the investigation of other digitally-mediated shared reading formats and activities and the information sources relating to them, such as those detailed above in Section 1.1. Lastly, existing research tends to focus on outcomes: the skills, attainment and comprehension developed through children's shared reading, rather than the experience of reading itself.

The dominance of these three areas means that there is a dearth of research which asks children, as well as the adults in their lives, about their shared reading, a deficit of studies into reading practices which don't fall into a designated category, such as eBooks or physical books, and a lack of research that focuses on the information experiences of shared digital reading activities rather than on etic concepts related to skills and comprehension.

People's digital adaption of shared reading practices during the pandemic highlighted what was already described as the 'multifaceted, complex, multi-layered reading practices that digitisation has produced' (Mangen, 2016 p. 258), further compounded by the already complex interplay between child, adult and book variables, characteristic of shared book reading (Kucirkova and Rvachew, 2017). Children's experience of information and the role of information literacy in these reading activities and how they are constructed and enacted becomes increasingly important in understanding the dispersed forms of reading which arose

in a particular context and incorporated a variety of reading formats, devices and people. Taking a sociocultural view of information literacy as constructed and emerging through practice will illuminate these complex shared digital reading practices and the social, material and embodied elements which shaped them.

Situated in the Information Studies field, which has firm foundations in cataloguing and exploring ways of reading; in exploring practices from a sociocultural information literacy point of view and in asking children for their opinions, this study will address these neglected areas of children's shared digital reading.

1.3 Scope

1.3.1 Focus on four- to eight-year-olds

This study focuses on children aged four- to eight-years-old. The National Literacy Trust's 2021 Annual survey of 4,749 children aged five- to eight-years-old found that almost all (95.6%) said that they enjoyed hearing stories read to them (Best, 2021 p. 2). This study takes that age range and also includes four-year-olds who attend primary school in the UK from this age and so were included in the call for recruitment in the study. This decision is supported by Baverstock's finding that the most popular age group for shared reading activity in her work on veterans reading to their children was four- to eight-years old (Baverstock *et al.*, 2021).

This research design draws the upper age range boundary at eight-year-old children on the basis of Miller and Warschauer's (2014) review of research on children reading digitally. This review of the literature suggests that it is at age nine that children commonly shift to reading independently for meaning and is supported by Chall *et al.* (1990) and Chall (1996). Furenes, Kucirkova and Bus (2021) suggest that until the age of eight children's first experiences of books are typically modelled and mediated by adults at home (p. 484). Whilst

this study does not suggest that children over the age of eight do not enjoy shared reading, these studies suggest that this is an appropriate age-range to investigate the shared reading practices of children in the home.

1.3.2 Focus on the home

This research focuses on children's shared digital reading practices in their homes which has not been a focus for Library and Information Studies work on children with the exception of Agosto *et al.*, (2012), Danby *et al.*, (2013) and Given *et al.* (2016) where digital activities were the focus. Even before the pandemic forced research on children's reading to be situated in a home environment, there were interdisciplinary calls for increased research attention to the home (Morgade, Aliagas and Poveda, 2019 p. 109). This is because the home learning environment is key to a child's intellectual and social development (Crew, 2020; Montag, 2015; Hanson, 2017) including children's early-literacy experiences and their understanding of oral language, book and print concepts' (Afflerbach, 2015, p. 273). Morgade, Aliagas and Poveda (2019) argued that many childhood studies:

> lack a clear, complex view of the home or even contribute to making visible the home setting as analytically relevant to the research process (p. 109).

Aside from the pandemic, research has shown that the home literacy environment is changing, as digital technology becomes part of everyday life (Kumpulainen and Gillen, 2017) and many factors influence children and their family's engagement with technology in the home (Plowman, McPake and Stephen, 2010). The mediation of digital technologies by families in the home has been identified as a rich field for future research (Gillen, Flewitt and Sandberg, 2020; Sairanen *et al.*, 2022) including in the Information Studies field (Danby, 2017; Agosto, 2019). This extends to reading as 'the increased availability of digital reading resources for children has begun to disrupt and expand traditional reading activities at home

(Kucirkova & Flewitt, 2020, p. 2) where the home literacy environment has a significant effect on children's literacy development (López-Escribano, Escudero and Pérez-López, 2021 p. 814).

Flewitt and Clark's (2020) definition of the home literacy environment is adopted here. It was conceived of in a study for 0 – 3 year olds but is, in this researcher's view, applicable to older children given the evidence of their media usage (Ofcom, 2015; Ofcom, 2019; Ofcom, 2022). Flewitt and Clark (2020) argue that the home literacy environment should not be considered a

> bounded space situated neatly within layers of nested social systems [and that children's] encounters with these diverse systems are not fixed or static but occur dynamically in overlapping assemblages and entanglements in the fluidity of everyday life (p.465).

Libraries too need no longer be a single space, and librarians now have the ability to deliver their services online to children in their domestic settings (Jensen, 2020; Kass, 2020) and into the contexts that those include. As a result, understanding the user's reception of these reading activities becomes increasingly important in order to deliver effective services. Taking a sociocultural stance on information literacy suggests that the context in which practices take place, including the home environment, shapes and influences those practices. Understanding how digitally mediated reading practices emerge in home environments is therefore of value to library and information professionals.

This research takes place in the home providing empirical data for Information Studies and cognate disciplines. It uses participatory video methods as well as semi-structured interviews with children and takes the reading activity as the unit of analysis,

allowing for attention to the details and variations of the environment, making the home setting analytically relevant.

1.4 Significance

This thesis uses an information lens to identify and investigate the shared digital reading practices of young children and their families during the pandemic period of social distancing and isolation. It considers that information played a central role in the enactment of literacy practices constructed during a time of change and including visual, digital and media literacy (Lloyd, 2021). Given the unprecedented nature of the pandemic, how did young children aged four- to eight-years-old and their families experience information literacy practices relating to shared digital reading in their homes? This question draws attention to the ways in which children and their families used information to construct and mediate shared reading activities as part of adapting to a socially distanced environment. Technology played a crucial role in accessing information (Stejskal and Hajek, 2022 p. 391), creating a digitally 'information-abundant environment' (Liu, 2005, p. 709).

This research unpacks what factors enabled and constrained the ways in which children and their families' information literacy practices were enacted in relation to novel, contextual and digitally mediated ways of conducting shared reading. It also explores how they made meaning from the information sources at their disposal during a time of physical isolation, coupled with an abundance of digital access. It investigates what was valued and legitimised in the setting. It moves away from considering children's reading as being about outcomes, attainment and the acquisition of skills and focuses instead on children's information literacy, which is to say the 'ways of knowing the many environments that constitute an individual's being in the world' (Lloyd, 2007 p. 182). Employing the concept of information literacy practices from a sociocultural perspective, illuminates not just the reading activities

themselves, but how they were put together, during a time of change, using tools and technology, in relation to the social site and the actions and processes within it. It unlocks what elements of shared reading children and their families valued and preserved and how these elements were used to make meaning.

Responding to these questions by using an innovative qualitative study design and gathering participatory data from video recordings, as well as from semi-structured interviews with children and employing an innovative information and consent protocol, this research presents the theory of *binding together*. This provides a rich explanation of the ways children and their families engaged with information to allow them to maintain connection with important people in their lives through shared digital reading practices during a time of separation. The theory of *binding together* illustrates how bodies, material objects and sanctioned ways of reading drove the enactment of information literacy practices, which mediated and influenced shared digital reading activities in response to the socially distanced context.

The results create a record of children's shared digital reading experiences during a unique period of time and the unique contexts that children and their families read in together. This inquiry demonstrates that these information literacy practices were situated and contingent and related to that context. It contributes an emic understanding into how reading activities emerge as the result of certain entanglements and what hoped-for ends they might accomplish, rather than setting an evaluative goal as a researcher and seeing if these activities reached it. This study also contributes to new knowledge by directly using the theoretical basis for the study, not only to inform the data analysis but also in how the recruitment and consent process with co-researchers was carried out. In addition, it uses the theoretical model to analyse paratexts in an alternative way to close reading. These methods could be adapted elsewhere in the academy and beyond.

1.5 Thesis structure

Following the introductory chapter, Chapter 2 sets the context for the study through an investigation of relevant literature. The review explores scholarly work in relation to children's shared and digital reading in the Information Studies field. It identifies that this literature relies heavily on the opinions of adults, focuses on the comparison of eBooks vs physical books and is preoccupied with interventions and reading outcomes. It introduces the concept of information literacy from a sociocultural perspective and explores how it can be useful in the study of this kind of reading, drawing on the social, epistemic and corporeal modalities of information.

The literature review widens out to explore multidisciplinary research in the area of children's reading which echo the themes of Information Studies research. It unpacks gaps in current research by suggesting that children's perspectives need to be given, but that this needs to happen in the context of understanding these reading practices as shared and influenced by others. It moves on to suggest that the experience of reading eBooks compared to physical books is over-researched and that exploring ways of reading which happen across devices, platforms and formats represents a fruitful area of study. It highlights paratexts as a useful way of exploring digitally dispersed reading practices. Lastly, it suggests that the dominance of research into the outcomes, skills and acquisition of children's shared and digital reading means that there is room for a study which delves into the micro dynamics of that experience. It doing this, the review suggests that including analysis of the corporeal in relation to information is a useful way to frame reading experiences. At the end of this chapter, the research questions stemming from this literature review are presented, along with the objectives required to meet the aims of the research.

Chapter 3 outlines the study's theoretical and methodological framework. In this thesis this chapter precedes the chapter on research design (chapter 4) because, in addition to providing the sensitising theories through which the findings are analysed and discussed, agential realism and practice theory also directly inform the research design of this study. It provides an overview of constructivism, and explores how the constructivist grounded theory method used in this study is informed by a constructivist paradigm. It unpacks the sensitising concepts used in this study, beginning with sociomateriality and Karen Barad's agential realism, which forms the onto-epistemological framework for this research. It then couples this perspective with practice theory and argues that taking the practice as the unit of analysis is a critical move in the research design. It explores practice theory, including communities of practice and practice approaches to activity, the body, material objects, learning, knowledge, agency and power.

Chapter 4 focuses on the research design of the study. Following a methodological overview, it presents the co-researchers who took part in this research. It then presents the information giving and consent process which formed a key component of the research design and so is foregrounded in this chapter. It discusses how the sensitising theories framing this research informed this aspect of the research design. It then describes the methods used, detailing the use of participatory video methods, including a reflective section on how the use of this participatory method played out in practice. It then explores the use of semi-structured interviews with children. It details the procedures of the constructivist grounded theory method before detailing the compliance procedures of the research. It concludes by exploring the limitations of the methods.

Chapter 5 outlines the findings of the study. It opens by describing the theory of *binding together*, which forms the grounded theory of the study. Examining the information literacy practices manifest in the shared digital reading practices of children and their families

during a time of social distancing, the chapter presents the four categories and the overarching theory produced using constructivist grounded theory. The chapter explores the categories of longing, customising, navigating and belonging as well as the overarching category of *binding together.*

Chapter 6 explores the emergent theory of *binding together* in relation to the theoretical framework as well as literature from within and outside Information Studies. The chapter unpacks the theory of *binding together* using Karen Barad's agential realism, as well as practice theory with reference to communities of practice (Wenger, 1998) and the work of Schatzki. Through these concepts of agency, the social site and communities of practice, it looks at the customisation of information landscapes by aligning to and reconstructing known shared reading practices in the face of longing for one another during social distancing. It considers how information landscapes were customised through imagining new paratextual frames and by connecting people to old books which reference past personal experiences. It then explores how people navigated and engaged with these information literacy practices, including what enabled and constrained them including paratextual, material and bodily configurations. Lastly it draws on Wenger's (1998) ideas of reification and participation to explore how meaning was made through the social site.

Chapter 7 discusses the study's research questions through the theory of *binding together*. The chapter starts by exploring the theory of *binding together* in relation to children's experiences of shared digital reading practices during a unique period of time and makes connections with relevant Information Studies research. It looks at how these reading activities were constructed in relation to available sources of information and teleoaffective structures. It also examines the factors that enabled and constrained them as well as looking at how meaning was made within the social site.

Chapter 8 forms the conclusion of the study. The chapter examines the contributions of the research to Information Studies and pertaining to reading research. It also highlights the significance of the methodological manoeuvres used in this research for Information Studies and Publishing Studies scholars and beyond. It then outlines the recommendations for future areas of research.

Chapter 2: Literature review

2.1 Chapter overview

This integrated literature review explores the fields and approaches to recent reading scholarship with reference to studies which took place in the pandemic around the shared and digital reading practices of children, as well as to those before and after it. It considers what is known in this area and how knowledge might be extended. It investigates shared and digital reading as an information literacy practice and unpacks how this frame can facilitate new knowledge in the field. Taking a sociocultural perspective on information literacy, this review explores a move towards soliciting the views of children rather than the relying solely on the reports of adults. It explores how children's views can be balanced with the social and shared nature of these reading practices. It then considers how scholarship can examine digital reading formats and practices by moving beyond the comparisons of eBooks and physical books which dominate reading research. It does this by considering the material elements of shared digital reading and employing a focus on paratexts. Lastly, it explores how the study of reading can move beyond etic measurements of attainment and skills, instead examining the affective and embodied elements of reading. These discussions inform the theoretical and methodological perspective, research question and research design for this research, situated in Information Studies.

2.2 Search strategies

Reviewing reading scholarship in this area is characterised by the breadth and depth of work on children's shared in-person, digital and shared digital reading practices both before, after and during the pandemic. In addition to Information Studies, there is relevant research across disciplines including Digital Humanities, Publishing Studies, Education, Digital Literacy, Psychology, Computer Science, Family Studies, Early Childhood Studies, Media and Communication, Child Development and Sociology. This literature review did not include work from Voice or Performance studies which was considered to be beyond the scope of the inquiry, as these areas generally encompass a range of practices which do not include shared reading. However, as highlighted later in this thesis, this could be a fruitful field to consider for future research in the area of children's shared digital reading. There is also work on the subject from practitioners including librarians and teachers as well as research and reports from literacy organisations including The National Literacy Trust (Clark and Picton, 2020), Booktrust (Kucirkova and Littleton, 2016), The Reading Agency, thinktanks (Hilhorst, Lockey and Speight, 2018) and from Government departments (House of Commons Science and Technology Select Committee, 2019).

An extensive search was conducted for this literature review including SCOPUS, ERIC, Web of Science, Google Scholar, UCL Explore, Library and Information Science Abstracts, Library and Information Science Collection and Library and Information Science Source as well as leading journals in the field. Search terms focused on children; digital; Covid-19; families; the home; shared reading; online and digital reading as well as 'information literacy practices'. Wherever possible a large range of alternative search terms were used for each term. For example, in addition to the search term 'reading' the following were also used: 'reading practices'; 'literacy practices'; 'reading contexts'; 'reading experiences'; 'digital reading practices'; 'digital literacy practices'; 'interactive reading';

‘experience of reading’; ‘practice of reading’; ‘reading for pleasure’; ‘reading remotely’; ‘virtual reading’; and ‘live book reading’. More focused searches were conducted within the area under scrutiny including for example, ‘grandparents’, ‘authors’, ‘live streaming’, as well as many others. Searches threw up a large number of results which were filtered by the age range of the children who are the subject of this study. Although the focus of this study is the home, research which was relevant and took place in school or library settings is included in this review.

2.3 Information Studies and Publishing Studies work on children’s pandemic reading

In both Information Studies and Publishing Studies there is research which provides insights into children’s reading in the pandemic. Norrick-Rühl (2022) provides valuable context in situating children’s reading activities in the pandemic with a wider picture of the many children who did not have access to books and suggests that the ‘pandemic slide’ will cause long-term learning deficits in children’s reading attainment (p. 206).

Nolan *et al.*, (2022) and Sung and Chiu (2022) both explore parents attitudes to their children reading eBooks versus print books. Sung and Chiu (2022) found that parents preferred print books in some cases because they treasured the material properties of the book. Nolan *et al.*, (2022) found that parents believed that using screens came at the expense of reading books altogether. There are also reports about libraries response to the pandemic comparing usage of eBooks to physical books (Stejskal and Hajek, 2022). Soulen and Tedrow (2022, 2023) surveyed parents about their children’s access to library materials during the pandemic and found that their access to eBooks, physical books and audiobooks during the pandemic may change their attitudes towards preferred formats. There was also descriptive practitioner work describing how librarians moved to provide online reading

activities for children including via social media (Goddard, 2020; Bavington, 2021; Martin, 2021; McMenemy, Robinson and Ruthven, 2023).

This Information Studies and Publishing Studies research points to valuable directions for study in this area. Firstly, it is notable that in shared reading the opinions of parents and other adults (teachers and librarians) are significant. However, none of these studies solicit the opinions of children nor use observational methods. Soulen and Tedrow (2022) who researched children's access to library reading materials, note that their study was 'carried out during the pandemic [and] accessed parent respondents when children were not accessible.' (p. 455). They go on to recommend that future studies into children's information practices and experiences would best engage the child in order to gain a richer understanding.

This recommendation provides a central warrant for this research study which explores children's information literacy practice (conceived of here as an 'overarching information practice' (Lloyd, 2010c, p. 181)) and experiences in their homes in relation to their pandemic shared digital reading. It uses participatory video methods and semi-structured interviews with children to take in their perspectives of these shared reading activities, as well as those of their families who also contribute.

Secondly, the survey of work in Information and Publishing Studies on children's reading in the pandemic shows that there is an emphasis on the analysis of eBooks compared to physical books. This is despite the reported evidence detailed in the introduction to this thesis and as reported by the practitioners cited above, that there were other digitally mediated ways that children and their families used to read during the pandemic. These included recorded readings, reading by video conference and the use of social media. This study directly asks children and their families what shared digital reading practices they took

part in during the pandemic and explores their chosen practices to uncover ways of reading which do not necessarily divide neatly into either reading eBooks or physical books.

Lastly, much of the work in Publishing and Information Studies is focussed on the outcomes of reading including interventions to promote coping mechanisms. Many of the studies in these disciplines focused on reading interventions to help children create coping skills or to improve access to reading materials during the pandemic. Tiwari (2020) explored the creation of an eBook designed to explain the pandemic to children and adults and facilitated discussion between them. Similarly Azad and Chakravarty (2022) explored the characteristics of a digital story platform to provide access to reading material in multiple languages in the lockdowns. Adeyeye and Oboh (2022) used an 'affective bibliotherapy' intervention to help children develop coping skills in the face of the pandemic. Merga and Kristin (2021) highlight how books and reading can help young people alleviate stress in the pandemic. Baverstock *et al.*, (2021) explored the delivery of a reading intervention project for veterans in prison which took place during the pandemic, reporting on how prison staff found that it was a useful tool to support family connectivity (p. 11). Other work in the publishing field focussed on how people returned to old or favourite books during the time of crisis (Davies, Lupton and Gormsen Schmidt, 2022; Ebert, 2022). This study moves away from an evaluative perspective on reading and instead explores the information literacy practices of children's shared digital reading from a sociocultural perspective and as it was experienced within their individual contexts.

2.4 Conceptualising reading in Information Studies

In D. F. McKenzie's (1999) seminal text *Bibliography and the Sociology of Texts*, McKenzie argues that texts should be studied in their recorded form, through their transmission including the social processes of their production and reception. This study focuses on the

reception of texts by users, in this case children and their families. It recognises that the forms of texts and the intentions they serve are relative to specific time, place and person. This way of conceiving of what we read means that the texts can incorporate ‘the destabilized, the indeterminate and the open texts’ (p. 35). Conceiving of texts in this way allows scholars to show that the ‘forms effect meaning’ (McKenzie, 1999 p. 13) and, as McKenzie (1999) argues, texts should be regarded not as ‘fixed, determined artefacts in a specific medium, but as potential.’ (p. 51). That is to say that it is in their usage that texts coming into being as a social and cultural units (Brookey and Gray, 2017 p. 102). As Rita Felski (2020) puts it ‘artwork must be *activated* to exist’ (p. 7, original italics). She goes on to argue that they are ‘*constituted* via the act of reception’ (p. 147, original italics).

In Information Studies scholars have also recently called for a view of reading as contextual. Tattersall Wallin (2021) emphasises this perspective in her definition of reading, as taking:

> meaning from text in various formats and with different senses, without restricting reading to only be seen as one type of activity involving one human sense and one form of artefact or tool. (p. 433).

Lundh, Hedemark and Lindskold (2022) too, recommend ways to consider reading practices in research, which they term ‘Critical Studies of Reading.’ They suggest that reading should be understood as a situated practice, should be studied in context and to be considered as reasonable in the context it is carried out in and should be understood in relation to historical reading practices. They suggest that readers should be considered without applying deficit models to their activities, and that research should apply a non-evaluative approach to reading practices, considering them neither good nor bad. They also suggest that a different unit of analysis should be considered when studying reading to allow

for different perspectives and understanding, a point of view echoed by the digital literacy studies scholar, Murray (2022 p. 1) as well as Felski (2020, p. 144).

Lundh, Hedemark and Lindskold (2022) also question the need for the concept of 'information' when investigating reading. Whilst adhering to their position that reading should be the object of the study, the pandemic context of this study meant that children and their families found themselves in a position where forms of information were foundational in facilitating and delivering shared reading activities. The unprecedented change in adopting social distancing measures meant making use of and choosing from multiple information sources to remake, create and deliver their shared reading practices via digital means. Following Information Studies scholars who have researched reading, this constitutes a form of information work (McKenzie and Stooke, 2007; Hedemark, 2017). As a result, children and their families' chosen sources of information, and their information literacy practices in relation to these sources, were central to their reading activity. Additionally Dresang (2005) and Harlan (2019) have argued that reading should be considered as a form of information. Harlan (2019) emphasises that reading, and particularly reading fiction, is a form of art that provides a way to 'engage our emotions, to explore our world, a way to learn' (p.1), all of which constitute forms of information. In this way, Harlan (2019) argues that 'an aesthetic reading experience can be considered an information experience' (p. 2). Thus, exploring reading through an information lens is considered key to this thesis.

How information literacy is understood, how it will frame this study and how it assists in researching underexplored areas of reading is unpacked in the following section and is referenced throughout the remainder of the literature review. This demonstrates how a sociocultural approach to information literacy ties neatly to the approaches to reading outlined here and how it will be of use in exploring the identified gaps in reading research, which are elaborated on later in this literature review.

2.5 Information Literacy

Paul Zurkowski first used the term information literacy in 1974. His definition focussed heavily on the techniques and skills that people acquired as a result of using a wide range of information tools providing solutions for problems. The term found widespread acceptance in the 1980s and later Bruce's (1997) *The Seven Faces of Information Literacy* became a foundational text highlighting information literacy's use in both informal and formal learning contexts and as being strongly connected with critical and reflective thinking.

Information Literacy is recognised as a form of literacy which is the result of advances in information and communication technologies and their widespread use in Western societies (Cope and Kalantzis, 2000). It has been described as a core literacy of the twenty-first century, underpinning all other forms of literacy and making them possible (Garner, 2005). Literacy is understood to be not only the ability to read and write but also to

> understand, interpret and assess texts, to evaluate statements and to be able to take a standpoint when faced with flows of contradictory messages via various media and different types of source (Limberg, Sundin and Talja, 2012 p. 98)

It is, therefore, a literacy that encompasses information in all forms: print, digital, data, images and the spoken word and relates to other forms of literacy, such as digital or media literacy, rather than forming a standalone concept (Coonan *et al.*, 2018 p. 3). Information Literacy equips people 'not only to solve problems but also to frame problems and situations in new and ground-breaking ways' (Coonan *et al.*, 2018 p. 5). The study of reading, as the examples in the introduction illuminate, is no longer a matter of merely deciphering text and illustrations; instead reading practices can take place in digitally mediated and information-rich environments whereby an examination of information literacy can yield valuable

insights. Additionally, for children and families, the unprecedented change to a socially distanced environment meant that their information literacy came to the fore in how they might come up with solutions to create and conduct shared reading practices in digital settings.

2.5.1 Conceptions of Information Literacy

There are several papers which explore the different conceptions of information literacy in detail (Talja, Tuominen and Savolainen, 2005; Lupton and Bruce, 2010; Limberg, Sundin and Talja, 2012, Hicks, 2018). This literature review briefly describes and references these conceptions in relation to the sociocultural perspective of information literacy that this research adopts. In doing this, it highlights why this approach is an appropriate lens through which to explore the subject of children's shared digital reading in a socially distanced context and when reviewing the gaps in current scholarly literature on the subject.

A sociocultural approach to information literacy moves away from a generic or skills approach which regards literacy as a discrete set of skills to be learned by individuals, seeing it as 'neutral, objective, text-based, apolitical, reproductive, standardized and universal' (Lupton and Bruce, 2010 p. 4). This generic or skills approach considers information literacy to consist of 'a set of attributes which can be defined and measured in an exact manner' (Tuominen, Savolainen and Talja, 2005 p. 333) and that can be taught and evaluated independently of the practical tasks and contexts in which they are used (Tuominen, Savolainen and Talja, 2005 p. 330). This generic or skills based approach has been criticised as it omits social, cultural, historical and ideological contexts (Kapitzke, 2003).

Scholars in Information Studies have moved from this generic or skills approach to suggest that information can be understood in varied ways, and is related to various practices which are shaped in cultural, material and historical contexts. For example, cognitive

constructivist models focus on an individual's knowledge or meaning creation – their making sense of information (Talja, Tuominen and Savolainen, 2005; Veinot, 2007) and how this might be used to support successful user outcomes (Addison and Meyers, 2013 p. 7). Whilst this approach did produce key understandings on how people's thoughts and actions interact with their affective states (Kuhlthau, 1993), it has been criticized for the individualist position which assumed that information seeking is a 'rational, common sense based, individual practice' (Sundin, 2008 p. 31).

Relatedly, a phenomenographic approach to information literacy explores the variations of people's experiences of information literacy, placing the emphasis on 'the learner's ways of understanding the object of teaching' (Limberg, Sundin and Talja, 2012 p. 99). However, the focus on the individual learner at the centre of the inquiry means that these studies have been criticised for a somewhat 'one-sided' view (Limberg, Sundin and Talja, 2012 p. 113). Taking this approach in this research would limit the ability to explore the complex and varied understandings which are key when it comes to investigating reading practices which are by their nature, social, shared and developed within communities, be it families or school classes.

Instead, this thesis aligns with an information practice approach which represents a more sociologically and contextually orientated form of research (Savolainen, 2007, p. 120). The study of information practice 'shifts away from the behaviour, action, motives' of individuals and instead directs attention towards them as 'members of various groups and communities' (Savolainen, 2007, p. 120). In this thesis information literacy is informed by practice theory, which views all practices as social and rendered visible by sayings and doings with material arrangements that hang together, which is further explicated in Chapter 3. Information literacy is an example of an information practice that is enaced within a social setting. It is considered to be an 'overarching information practice that has the power to

explain the interplay between information, people and context' (Lloyd, 2010c, p. 181). This is because this conception of information literacy practice 'manifests as a sociocultural information practice in relation to the way people experience information and create meaning about this experience' (Lloyd, 2010c, p. 2) This sociocultural approach to information literacy considers that information literacy is 'embedded in the context in which the information practices are carried out' (Sundin and Francke, 2009 p. 3). Information literacy is defined as:

> a practice that is enacted in a social setting. It is composed of a suite of activities and skills that reference structured and embodied knowledge and ways of knowing relevant to the context. Information literacy is a way of knowing. (Lloyd, 2017 p. 94)

This way of thinking about information literacy practice, which guides this research, understands the concept of information to be 'any difference which makes a difference in some later event' (Bateson, 1972 p. 459). This change manifests as an alteration in knowledge, learning or the ways of knowing, referenced in the quote above. This change might be positive, negative or neutral (Lloyd, 2017 p. 94). Literacy is considered as 'socially and historically construed [and] cannot be generalized across cultures, or treated as neutral or as technical, because it is subject to power relationships within a culture.' (Lloyd, 2010c p. 13). The focus moves to the actions and processes through which information literacy emerges placing the emphasis on the practice of information literacy. Practice is understood as 'various manifestations of repeated activities, including historical, social, cultural and material ones' (Sundin and Francke, 2009 p. 3). In this way information literacy comes about through information needs, experiences and skills that 'cannot be learnt independently of the setting, as it is the setting which gives meaning to the experience' (Lloyd, 2009 p. 397). For children and their families, the context of the pandemic as well as other contexts personal to

each family, were inseparable from the shared reading activities which are the subject of this study.

As such, this perspective on information literacy seeks to understand the influence of the social, political and historical in information practices, taking into account ‘formal, informal, social and embodied sources of information’ (Lloyd, 2005 p. 87). Similar to the pedagogical ‘multiliteracies’ framework (Cope and Kalantzis, 2000) commonly used in Education, it seeks to situate information practices in context, in ‘specific structures of technology and of knowledge/information production’ (Buschman, 2009 p. 13), including dialogue and debate (Talja, Tuominen and Savolainen, 2005 p. 90). Limberg, Sundin and Talja (2012) suggest that ‘people’s use of information cannot be separated from the tools that are an integral part of social practices’ (p. 95) and the mastery of these communicative and technical tools is part of the mediation of the social practice (Limberg, Sundin and Talja, 2012 p. 104). Studying children and their families in a socially distanced context means that the choice, use and mastery of multiple tools in the form of technology and reading resources were integral to their shared reading activities. Researching these activities requires a situated and contextual understanding of their information literacy by conceiving of it as an information practice.

Additionally, Sundin and Francke (2009) point out that online settings have blurred the lines of producer, intermediary and user and that the web is a place for knowledge production rather than a collection of stable documents (p. 2). As a result, they suggest that this state of affairs requires research to consider learning and information practices as entwined. This study uses the concept of information literacy to explore children and their families’ intra-actions with reading practices, considering them as ongoing and relational activities which were not bound to one text or form of technology.

According to a sociocultural approach, Information Literacy is considered to be situated, whereby information carries differing meanings for individuals, for wider communities (Limbers and Sundin, 2006; Addison and Meyers, 2013) and in different contexts (Lloyd, 2005). Rejecting the idea that information practices are individual pursuits, a sociocultural approach considers that they are performed with others, who initiate new members and ensure that information activities reflect sanctioned and valued practices (Lloyd, 2010c). This is useful when considering shared reading, which is influenced by parents and other adults as a necessary part of the activity.

In relation, this kind of collective connection to information does not necessarily occur formally, rather it can be driven by social relationships and practices related to embodied learning (Lloyd, 2005 p. 87). This is a critical factor to consider when researching children's shared reading in their home: informal settings which involve others, often family members. In this way information literacy processes can be difficult to discern and as such the methods for this research need to incorporate ways of exploring people's embodied actions, which it will do through the use of participatory video. It is also essential to consider embodied actions where young children and their families may not always use words to express themselves to one another.

Related to both the situated and co-created aspects of information literacy is the understanding that people's established information practices might change in different circumstances, foregrounding how people reconceive their understanding in new settings (Hicks, 2018 p. 23). It recognises that information competencies, which include ways of reading 'cannot be taught "for life" independent of the practical domains and tasks in which they are used' (Tuominen, Savolainen and Talja, 2005 p. 330). In this study, taking change into account is crucial in relation to the unprecedented socially distanced context that families found themselves in. A sociocultural point of view also acknowledges tacit or vernacular

information which structures the social (Lloyd and Wilkinson, 2019). This is important because it means that research in home-based informal contexts can represent ‘other voices and other ways of knowing’ (Lloyd, 2005 p. 84), including those of young children, as well as individual differences between them and their families.

Information literacy, when viewed from a sociocultural point of view, offers a number of useful tools and perspectives through which children’s shared reading practices, remade via digital means during social distancing in the pandemic, can be viewed. This conception of information literacy can be used to understand what sources of information were accessed and how certain sources of information, in the form of texts, technologies and constructed ways of reading influenced and shaped practices in a particular context. These ways of reading were as much about information literacy, as it is understood from a sociocultural point of view, as they were about print or digital literacy. Participation in the practices relied on being able to access a variety of forms of information. In short,

> understanding how information literacy emerges and the conditions that enable and constrain its emergence allows us to understand the deeper social and material complexities associated with the practice – Lloyd, 2021 p. xx

Taking a sociocultural information literacy stance will allow this research to contribute to the call for reading research in a digital age which requires consideration of the material, embodied and social aspects (Sefton-Green *et al.*, 2016, p. 29). In so doing, this will shine a light on what information sources are privileged and why. Sociocultural conceptions of information literacy have been proven to show value in research used in pandemic contexts to explore resistance to certain forms of information (Hicks and Lloyd, 2021). Considering information literacy as a situated practice researchers have demonstrated how information creation forms a key part of information literacy (Trace, 2007) and how young people’s

literacy practices are multiformat and multicontextual (Agosto, 2022). The role of trust in digital environments (Haider and Sundin, 2022) has been explored, as well as how information literacy wields forms of power (Pilerot and Lindberg, 2011; Folk, 2019, 2021). All of this work is pertinent in investigating the newly created, pandemic situated, digitally mediated, multiformat reading experiences of young children and their families that form the basis of this study. This literature review now moves to explore some of the key information literacy concepts used throughout this study.

2.5.2 Information environments, landscapes and modalities

Drawing substantially on the work of Lloyd (2010c; 2017; 2021) this research uses certain concepts in order to explore information literacy from a sociocultural point of view, in relation to children's shared digital reading practices. These concepts are detailed here and inform the research question and sub questions which are central to this study.

Central to the requirements of this study is the concept of modalities of information which are social, epistemic and corporeal (Lloyd, 2010c). Lloyd explains that social modalities are nuanced types of information that are formed around traditions and conventions of practice or social exchange and which enable and constrain information literacy practice. Epistemic modalities are sources of information which reference rules and regulations which are often experienced via text and are objective, factual and reproducible. Lastly corporeal information is the physical information drawn from the body, performances of practice which are nuanced and contingent. These modalities are entwined rather than separate from one another (Lloyd, 2017 p. 95). In drawing on these modalities people are able 'to enact their information literacies and shape their information landscapes which, in turn, reference the social site' (Lloyd, 2017, p. 95).

Lloyd's work describes information environments as sites of stable and established knowledge, reflecting social, corporeal and epistemic modalities of information which shape and support established bodies of knowledge that have built up over time (Burnett and Lloyd, 2019 p. 3), for example how to be a pupil or a teacher. People draw on these information environments in order to construct 'information landscapes' defined as the 'communicative space through which people develop identities and form relationships based on shared practices and ways of doing and saying things' (Lloyd, 2010, p. 9). More recently Lloyd's conception of information landscapes (2010c; 2017; 2021) has evolved and is represented as subjective spaces which are drawn from intersubjectively constructed information environments. Information landscapes therefore have intersubjective (shared) and subjective (individual) qualities. This means that people understand and interpret the actions and language used within the information landscape in the same way, thus creating shared meaning between them. This mutual understanding comes from people's 'previous experiences, histories, social and material practices' (Lloyd, 2021, p. 3) and as a result are 'socially and culturally influenced' (Lloyd, 2010c, p. 15). As such, these intersubjective spaces are created over time and information can be tacit and nuanced as well as explicit (Lloyd, 2010c p. 20). In turn the information within a landscape is understood subjectively: it has a personal effect on an individual in a way which is singular to them. This focus on both intersubjective and subjective understandings in relation to meaning making and identity is vital in a study which focus on 'shared' reading as a practice which involves more than one person as well as how the experience of shared reading impacts children individually.

The experience of this landscape including learning to use the available information resources involves people understanding its unique characteristics (Lloyd, 2009 p. 398). The outcome of information literacy is an understanding of what there is in a landscape and to draw meaning from the experience and engage with information (Lloyd, 2014 p. 88).

Utilising the concept of information landscapes, which draws from modalities of information which enable and constrain the practice, allows this research to explore the informational sources which families drew on to construct their information landscapes pertaining to shared digital reading activities during social distancing. Employing the concept of modalities of information will illuminate understanding of what is valued and sanctioned in the social site in relation to these reading activities and the shared and digital aspects of them.

2.6 Widening the literature review

This literature review now moves to explore how an information literacy lens can generate new knowledge in the field of children's shared and digital reading. It explores the literature beyond Information Studies, which covers children's shared digital reading prior to, during the pandemic and after the pandemic. Primarily, it seeks to contribute to the call from a group of leading reading research scholars, who form E-READ (Evolution of Reading in the Age of Digitisation), a research initiative funded by COST (European Cooperation in Science & Technology) (Mangen and van der Weel, 2016 p. 119; Sefton-Green *et al.*, 2016 p. 29) who urged researchers to adopt a radical transdisciplinary outlook to the study of reading in a digital age, paying attention to the social, material and embodied aspects of reading (Kucirkova, 2019b; Kuzmičová, Schilhab and Burke, 2020; Mangen & van der Weel, 2016; Sefton-Green *et al.*, 2016). By employing a sociocultural understanding of information literacy and using concepts relating to information literacy practice, including information landscapes and the related social, epistemic and corporeal modalities (Lloyd, 2010a; 2021) this study directly addresses this call.

The three themes which ran across the already discussed work in Information Studies: adult centred research; comparative research between eBooks and physical books; and studies which focus on skills, attainment and outcomes are also evident in wider research areas. The

review uses this literature to unpack the methodological manoeuvres needed to research texts in the way that McKenzie (1999) suggests and reading in the way that Tattersall Wallin (2021) defines and to consider an appropriate unit of analysis to employ, in line with the calls from Lundh, Hedemark and Lindskold (2022), Murray (2022) and Felski (2020).

2.6.1 The opinions of adults and children

Studies into children's reading which centre solely on the opinions of parents are found in and beyond the Information Studies and Publishing fields both before (Akindele, 2012; Baker, Scher and Mackler, 2013; Johnson, 2014; Broekman *et al.*, 2016; Cheng and Tsai, 2016; Bergman Deitcher, Aram and Adar, 2019; Eutsler, 2019; Kucirkova and Flewitt, 2020), during (Sonnenschein, Grossman and Grossman, 2021; Sonnenschein, Stites and Ross, 2021; Nolan *et al.*, 2022; Sung and Chiu, 2022) and after the pandemic (Kucirkova and Grøver, 2022). They provide valuable insights into the influence that parents play in children's reading practices (Akindele, 2012; Baker, Scher and Mackler, 2013) including how parental attitudes powerfully shape how shared reading is conducted in the home (Kucirkova and Grøver, 2022). They also suggest that parents are not always in favour of children's use of digital technology when reading (Kucirkova and Littleton, 2016; Merga and Roni, 2018). Relatedly, they explore how parents monitor children's screen use (Ozturk and Ohi, 2022).

This research is accompanied by acknowledgements that children's views on their participation in literacy and reading activities during the pandemic are not represented (Sonnenschein, Stites and Ross, 2021; Lin *et al.*, 2023; Sonnenschein *et al.*, 2023) as well as calls for more observational data about children's interactions when reading (Sonnenschein, Stites and Ross, 2021 p. 807). This call for research from children's perspectives extends to studies which solicited the views of other adults, not just parents, for example teachers (Chen and Adams, 2022) and librarians (Soulen and Tedrow, 2022).

The Information Studies field also calls for increased attention in exploring young children's usage and preference of reading material in the pandemic (Soulen and Tedrow's 2022; 2023); and, prior to the pandemic, of their reading experiences and activities (Lundh, 2011; Hedemark, 2012; Hampson Lundh, 2013), of digital technology (Given *et al.*, 2016b) including the practices from the perspective of the children themselves (Lundh, 2011; Hedemark, 2012; Hampson Lundh, 2013; Barriage, 2016, 2021; Agosto, 2019).

Information Studies has an established tradition of researching with young children (Mckechnie, 2000, 2006; Bilal, 2005; Dresang, 2005; Large, Nesset and Beheshti, 2008; Lundh, A. & Limberg, 2008; Spink *et al.*, 2010; Lundh, 2011; Lundh and Alexandersson, 2012; Hampson Lundh, 2013; Barriage, 2016, 2021; Dolatkhah and Hampson Lundh, 2016). However, the way in which Information scholars conceive of their information literacy and information experiences has a bearing on how children are studied within the discipline.

In her seminal dissertation on primary school children's information activities, Lundh (2011) points to a strain of Information Studies research into children which draws from a cognitive constructivist point of view (p.11). By these accounts (Bilal, 2005; Cooper, 2005; Large, Nesset and Beheshti, 2008; Meyers, Fisher and Marcoux, 2009; Spink *et al.*, 2010) children are seen as having ordered and sequential developmental stages, universal traits and are regarded as a universal group (Lundh, 2011 p. 14). For example, Meyers, Fisher and Marcoux (2009) describe how 'cognitive ability occurs first on the social plane and it is then internalized by the individual' (p. 306) suggesting that knowledge or learning is something which is out there, to be taken up by individuals. These studies emphasise the importance of appropriately designed interfaces for example, suggesting that children are an innate and 'distinct user group' (Large, Nesset and Beheshti, 2008 p. 121) which in turn leads on to explanations about how they will behave with information.

Lundh (2011, 2013, 2016) and others (Hedemark, 2012; Barriage, 2021) instead take the position that children are ‘important cultural beings by virtue of being themselves’ (Hedemark, 2012 p. 118) and are worthy of study not just as developing adults who are reaching certain established stages of development, but instead as individuals with unique ways of knowing. This view of children also refutes the implication, inherent in the cognitivist model, that children are homogenous rather than a diverse group ‘in different situations, historical contexts and societies’ (Lundh, 2016 p. 3).

A sociocultural information literacy perspective, drawing on New Literacy Studies and multiliteracies, highlights the importance of questioning whose conception of information literacy is valued (Hicks, 2018 p. 27). Understanding information literacy to be enacted and shaped (or reshaped) according to the doings and sayings of the social site (Lloyd, 2010c; Schatzki, 2002) means that it is a stance which ‘acknowledges the different views that participants hold about what constitutes information, knowledge and ways of knowing’ (Lloyd, 2021 p. 6). There is an imbalance in research between child and adult perspectives which highlights the issues of power within those relationships (Aarsand, 2016) and this extends to studies about shared reading. Taking a sociocultural perspective on information literacy, as this study does, will require a theoretical framework and set of methods which allow children to put their point of view across, understanding that they can do so in their own terms, in order to address the scholarly warrants in Information Studies and beyond which are detailed here and call for increased attention to children’s perspectives.

2.6.2 Reading is social

However, work on children in the LIS field also widely agrees that reading is not something which is done in isolation, rather it is a highly social activity (Hampson Lundh, 2013 p. 35) where parents, friends and extended family members influence children’s practices

(McKenzie and Stooke, 2007; Hedemark, 2012; Baverstock, 2016). This is also the case with young people's digital practices, which research has shown, happen in shared family spaces and with family members including parents and grandparents (Danby, 2017). Davidson *et al.*, (2021) call for a 'close focus on interactions that occur between parents and their children during their everyday activity' (p. 477) in the home. Research also recognises that young people's interactions with information, information devices and systems are also largely social in nature (Agosto, 2019) and further research is recommended into the sociocultural contexts of children's homes, relationships between children, parents, siblings and other family members (Sairanen *et al.*, 2022) and children's information practices with technology as 'collaborative behaviours and other ways of being with information' (Agosto, 2019 p. 110).

Reading with others is important because it can produce new potential for meaning making (Tattersall Wallin, 2021). In scholarship beyond Information Studies, Martinez and Roser (1985) argued that when a parent or teacher reads the same story to children several times, they begin to attend to different aspects of the story than they did on the first reading (p. 782). Al-Yagout and Nikolajeva (2018) stress that there are no reliable studies considering the consequences of books read by different voices (p. 6). Cremin and Moss (2018) suggest that 'reading in the proximity of others unquestionably deserves more attention' (p. 59). As a result, this research considers that a research design is needed where children's perspectives are accounted for, but in a way which still accounts for the shared nature of these reading activities.

Lastly, the social nature of reading, evident in research findings into children's shared reading at home, recognises that they are 'subject to negotiation with their family members' (Kucirkova and Grøver, 2022 p. 7). Children are subject to the power relations around who in the family can make choices, add content and the roles that people play (Sairanen *et al.*,

2022). Hedemark (2017) in a study on library storytelling sessions found that although parents have greater opportunities to influence and dominate children, that children too were able to find opportunities to exercise power over adults through forms of resistance. This evidence of social relations, including those of power relations warrants a theoretical framework that takes power into account in the ways in which shared reading is shaped and enacted. This will be addressed in the chapter on research design.

The sociocultural approach to information literacy takes power relations into account. In this way information literacy is considered as something which is enacted, as supposed to the cognitive conception of information literacy as something which one has or which one can acquire. The relational, contextual and social activity which constitutes shared reading takes place in the 'site of the social' (Schatzki, 2002 p. 173). From this perspective information literacy cannot be considered to be comprised of individual cognitive skills, rather information literacy forms in groups and organisations which are interdependent (Bruce, 2000) where people learn to 'act knowledgeably' in a setting (Tuominen, Savolainen and Talja, 2005 p. 340). It considers that knowledge is developed within communities of practice (Lloyd, 2012) and, as such, 'what constitutes literacy will vary with the context and be different for each person and social group' (Lupton and Bruce, 2010 p. 5). Thus this research considers that information literacy practices, including shared digital reading activities, are learned and enacted within a community (Sundin and Francke, 2009 p. 3). Therefore, the unit of analysis for this study becomes the information literacy practice itself rather than the child, the reading material or the device.

From an information literacy practice perspective it is critical to acknowledge that children's information practices are not all the same, instead their information literacies are situated within specific contexts (Tuominen, Savolainen and Talja, 2005; Lloyd, 2010b; Lundh and Alexandersson, 2012). Hedemark (2017) suggests that more research-based

knowledge is needed about literacy practices taking place in different contexts (p. 107). Likewise, Lundh (2013) in her study of children's activities around talking books, argues that investigation into the different contexts in which children use books could create deeper understanding (p. 36).

Accounting therefore for the sociality, relationality and contextuality of these shared reading practices, taking the socially distanced backdrop of the pandemic and the individual natures of the families of the study into account, supports widening the unit of analysis to the activity within the social site, that is to say the practice. This follows the sociocultural perspective of information literacy, whereby it only 'exists through the performance of information activities that reflect the ways in which information is created, valued and organised within a specific context' (Hicks, 2018a p. 196).

All this is to say that this research takes the stance that shared reading practices are social and originate from the relations between the members of the community, and as such the attention in this research is directed towards 'members of various groups and communities that constitute the contexts of their mundane activities' (Savolainen, 2007 p. 120). Taking their reading practice as the smallest unit of analysis means that relationality, which is key in these shared activities, can be accounted for. Employing an information literacy perspective, which interrogates the role of power in the privileging of certain forms of information or ways of knowing, will offer a valuable tool in exploring this nuanced situation (Lloyd, 2021). Additionally, this study will employ Practice Theory as an approach through which to explore how the practice itself unfolds. This is detailed in the theory and methodology chapter which follows this literature review.

Not only does the sociocultural view of information literacy understand it to be social and situated, it also considers that materiality shapes activity (Tuominen, Savolainen and

Talja, 2005; Hampson Lundh, 2013). This review now moves to explore how reading formats and technologies are considered in reading scholarship, a key element of this study where information literacy understands that social relations and technologies are mutually constituted (Tuominen, Savolainen and Talja, 2005). It begins with an overview of reading using digital formats.

2.6.3 Reading using digital formats

Academic interest in digital reading is widespread and has a strong focus on eBooks. In Publishing Studies, Digital Media and Communication and Digital Humanities there is work which focuses on how adults read digitally and use formats including eBooks (Dietz, Warwick and Rayner, 2015; Rowberry, 2017; Dietz, 2019; Bergström and Höglund, 2020; Harwell and Gallagher, 2020) and digital reading including hypertext studies (Dietz, 2023b) including from fields including Education, Communication and Digital Media (Patrickson, 2018; Scolari, 2019); digital paratexts (Barnett, 2020), defining the book in a digitally social age (Johnson, 2019) and on interactive digital texts (Bell *et al.*, 2018; Pope, 2020; Rowberry, 2020) and digital literary magazines (Dietz, 2014). Baverstock's (2013) work on shared reading interventions with armed forces families and veterans in prison references these families' digital reading practices, including the use of audiobooks as an alternative to reading print books, demonstrating scope for development in this area.

In Information Studies, there are studies into children's digital reading. Wang, Lee and Ju's quantitative study examined how three- to five-year olds used digital content on a mobile including app books and augmented reality books in Korea (2019). Sung and Chen's (2019) study of five to six-year-olds in Taiwan looked at how they used multimedia stories in a controlled one-to one-setting, which recommended further research in familiar and natural settings and to taking a sociocultural approach (p. 165), as this study does.

Beyond Information Studies and Publishing Studies, there is work using close textual analysis of eBooks or story apps (Aguilera *et al.*, 2016) and studies which looked at the reading practices of children using eBooks (Kucirkova and Littleton, 2016; Kucirkova, Littleton and Cremin, 2017; Chwyl, 2018; Dore *et al.*, 2018), iPads (Flewitt, Messer and Kucirkova, 2015) or story apps (Aliagas and Margallo, 2017; Merchant, 2014). In short there is currently a keen and active academic interest in digital reading formats.

2.6.4 eBooks vs physical books

The dominant trend in this area is the comparison between reading eBooks or other forms of reading text on screens to reading physical books. This was the subject of many studies situated in the pandemic (Sun *et al.*, 2021; Sun, Loh and Nie, 2021; Nolan *et al.*, 2022; Stejskal and Hajek, 2022; Sung and Chiu, 2022; Gómez-Merino *et al.*, 2023) and also in reading research unrelated to the pandemic (Dietz, 2014; Mangen, Olivier and Velay, 2019; Smith, 2021; Liu, 2022) and in relation to children's reading (Korat and Shamir, 2007; Moody, Justice and Cabell, 2010; Mangen, Walgermo and Brønnick, 2013; Parish-Morris *et al.*, 2013; Yuill and Martin, 2016; Rvachew *et al.*, 2017; McVicker, 2017; Barzillai and Thomson, 2018; Gilleece and Eivers, 2018; Støle, Mangen and Schwippert, 2020; Kotrla Topić, Šakić Velić and Merkaš, 2020).

Such is the interest in comparing the experience of reading on screen to reading using paper across adult and child readers that there are no fewer than four meta-analysis on the subject (Delgado *et al.*, 2018; Kong, Seo and Zhai, 2018; Clinton, 2019; Furenes, Kucirkova and Bus, 2021). Clinton (2019) examined 33 studies, Delgado *et al* (2018) looked at 38 studies, Kong *et al* (2018) looked at 17 studies and Furenes, Kucirkova and Bus (2021) looked at 39 studies, which in their case related specifically to child readers under eight-years-old. It is worth noting that the studies included in these meta-analyses, and those

mentioned in the preceding paragraph, come from a wide range of countries where cultural contexts of reading could be a valuable area of study. Whilst this is beyond the scope of this research, it may provide an interesting future direction for research.

The preoccupation with eBooks that this wealth of studies demonstrates, is not however, reflective of UK children's reading habits, including during the pandemic. eBooks accounted for 4.5% (by value) of the children's books (including young adult books aimed at teenage readers) sold in the UK market in 2020, which rose to 7% in 2021 and fell back slightly to 6.4% in 2022 (Matt Orzlowski, Business Development Manager, Nielsen BookScan, personal communication, 8th March 2023). Audiobooks by comparison were 6% of the market in 2022 (Matt Orzlowski, Business Development Manager, Nielsen BookScan, personal communication, 23rd March 2023), the remainder being made up of print books. Although eBook usage increased during the pandemic, these figures show that they do not represent how most children were reading. Similarly, in Australia Nolan *et al.* (2022) reports that the rise in children reading eBooks in lockdown rose by 5% to 23% of children, and although a sharp rise, this still represents a minority proportion of children (p. 753).

These statistics don't take into account the eBooks that are not bought but are freely available online, or via subscription or library services. However, they are supported by findings from the National Literacy Trust which found that 77% of children aged between 5 – 8 read on paper compared to 21% who had read stories on screen (Cole *et al.*, 2022 p. 5). Rideout (2013, 2014, 2017) reports that in the USA independent electronic reading was not popular among children under the age of eight.

This is not to denigrate the research in this area, but rather to concur with Kucirkova (2020) when she argues that there is an imbalance in the amount of literature on children's reading of print books versus digital books compared to their other reading activities on

screen (p. 825). If anything, the scholarly emphasis on comparisons between paper and screen reading suggests that this is an area where there are strong feelings attached about children's reading on and their use of screens. This highlights Sundin's (2008) point that tools are not neutral but signify aspects of power and the symbolic value of information (p. 5).

These meta studies into eBooks versus physical books do offer insights into experiences of reading in digital environments which offer sensitising concepts for this study into digitized forms of shared reading. While Delgado *et al.* (2018), Kong, Seo and Zhai (2018) and Clinton (2019) all found that reading on screen had a negative effect on reading performance compared to paper, Furenes, Kucirkova and Bus's study (2021), which focused on emergent readers aged one- to eight-years-old, found inconsistent results. They found that comprehension was lower with digital books read independently by children and adult mediation was more effective with print books (p. 483). Yet, they also found that there were instances where digital books with story congruent enhancement outperformed physical books (p. 483). Other findings suggested that children's parents had a preference for paper books (Sung and Chiu, 2022; Gómez-Merino *et al.*, 2023), that digital devices have different user interfaces and material affordances (Mangen, Olivier and Velay, 2019) and that a digital device's ability to store other content as well as books was sometimes distracting to readers (Sun, Loh and Nie, 2021; Liu, 2022). Studies found that parents interacted more with children when reading in print over digital (Parish-Morris *et al.*, 2013; Barzillai and Thomson, 2018) and that children found printed materials provided a smoother reading process (Sun *et al.*, 2021).

This focus on eBook versus print book reading draws a divide between online and offline practices in the form of digital or physical formats which does not reflect the media landscape in which children read. Ofcom (2022) reports that 'use of the internet was an integral part of children's day to day lives, with increasingly little distinction between the

worlds of ‘offline’ and ‘online’ (p. 78). Instead, scholarship suggests that the digital environment is ubiquitous and permeates everyday life (Dresang, 2005 p. 179). Research in Publishing, Information Literacy and Digital Literacy fields has found that online and offline literacy activities do not take place as discrete entities, rather as enmeshed practices (Burnett *et al.*, 2014; Marsh, Hannon, *et al.*, 2017; Marsh, Mascheroni, *et al.*, 2017; Lloyd and Wilkinson, 2019; Rowberry, 2020) with work finding this in relation to children’s digital play and learning (Marsh, 2010, 2014; Burnett, 2014; Kumpulainen and Gillen, 2017) including reading at home (Eutsler, 2019; Kucirkova and Flewitt, 2020). The use of digital devices was further heightened during the pandemic (OECD, 2021; Ofcom, 2022) including for reading activities (Clark and Picton, 2020). As Erstad and Gillen (2019) put it:

> the boundary between digital and non-digital is just one way of reifying a boundary that is in many ways artificial (p. 33).

Rather contemporary book and reading scholarship considers that digital and analogue book technologies exist with simultaneous relevance (Dane and Weber, 2021). Noorda and Inman Berens (2021) point out that books exist within a connected media ecosystem (p. 227) and Johnson (2021) emphasizes how they can be shared across multiple platforms (p. 29). In short ‘it is unhelpful to take a binary view of digital and conventional literacy practices’ (Rodriguez Leon, 2020 p. 22).

This research also considers that, even armed with the published corpus of literature into shared digital reading, we do not know all the ways in which families use digital technology in shared reading practices and how they are individually experienced and produced in particular contexts, including the pandemic context in the UK in which this study took place as well as individual family contexts within that. Thus, the research design and questions in this study need to be deliberately left open, to avoid placing boundaries on the study by limiting its scope too tightly (Bryman, 2016).

A sociocultural perspective on information literacy acknowledges that tools and technologies influence information literacy practices and people enact forms of information literacy with the help of tools (Sundin, 2008 p. 4). Reading, considered as a materially mediated information literacy practice, allows for a nuanced perspective where tools and technology form part of the practice in relation to the people who use them alongside the situations and contexts that they are used in. This, along with taking the practice as the unit of analysis, means the research design of this study needs to encompass a theoretical and methodological perspective which takes the material into account, a strand of scholarship which is explored in the next section of this chapter.

2.6.5 Reading is material

The material properties of physical books have long been recognised as a factor in how readers engage with them. Picturebook scholar Nodelman, echoing the work of McKenzie (1999), points to the sociocultural perspective, inherent in the material understandings of picturebooks:

> our expectations of a book with glossy, four-colour pictures differ from those we have of a fat-leather bound volume with small print and no pictures at all, *only because of our previous knowledge of a number of different kinds of books*' [my italics] (Nodelman, 1989, p. 42).

All this suggests that more nuanced and context specific research into children's digital reading is needed, which moves the focus away from comparing formats. As Information Studies scholars who study reading have pointed out, children's literacy practices include the use of many different texts (Hedemark, 2017) and encompass pictures, illustrations as well as alphabetic and numerical text (Lundh, 2011; Lundh and Alexandersson, 2012) and take place on varying forms of media (Hampson Lundh, 2013).

Broadening out the unit of analysis to the practice which will take in sociocultural and material perspectives, opens up that nuanced and context specific understanding of children and family reading practices. The concept of information literacy landscapes also facilitates a widening of perspectives in exploring information literacy practices. The use of information landscapes has been questioned by Savolainen (2021) who asserts that information practices are 'increasingly accomplished in 'space-less' digital environments' (p. 664). However, work in Publishing and allied fields Digital Studies and Digital Humanities have established that material properties extend to the digital, whereby something virtual can be considered to have material properties (Shep, 2016; Drucker, 2007; 2013; 2016; Kirschenbaum, 2012; Dietz, 2019). This has also been established in sociocultural approaches to information literacy which emphasise the material aspects of digital information (Limberg, Sundin and Talja, 2012).

In Digital Humanities, Drucker's work, focusing on artist's books (2004) and e-books (2007; 2013; 2016), argues that the 'material conditions provide an inscriptional base, a score, a point of departure, a provocation, from which a work is produced as an event' (Drucker, 2013 p. 2). McKenzie and Stooke (2007) in their study of library storytimes support this view. They found that the physical management of material artifacts 'communicated transitions and indicated appropriate activities for various times and places' (p. 12). Drucker's argument situates the material into the context in which it is produced. Murray (2018) describes the material as situated, thus:

> the haptic qualities of the reading device, the format and interface of the screen display, the interactive affordances of particular e-readers, and aural possibilities such as text-to-speech read-aloud functions [that] all profoundly influence a reader-cum-listener-cum-audience-member's consumption of a text (p. 387).

Picturebook scholars Al-Yagout and Nikolajeva (2018) argue, in their work on picturebook apps, that ‘performativity and engagement, then, become crucial for understanding how apps work and how they affect the reader’ (p. 275). However, recent scholarship has emphasised that in digital environments content and form do not necessarily constitute a whole: texts are copied from one interface to another or aggregated across platforms. Thus, ‘the way in which a web page is structured and functions will influence conditions for interacting with it’ (Limberg, Sundin and Talja, 2012 p. 105). As a result, a research design which takes into account this dispersed material environment, performativity and engagement becomes an important factor.

Situated in Digital Literary studies, Murray (2022) suggests that reading research needs a ‘meso’ level. This mid-level approach would sit between the two poles which currently dominate the field – quantitative macro-level studies on one hand and close reading of individual texts on the other. She argues that this meso level is needed in order to explore the ‘powerful new digital intermediaries; the blurring of author/reader/reviewer roles and the continued existence of print artefacts within online environments’ (p. 1). Understanding reading in these ways is key when investigating the reading activities that were reported in the pandemic where family members or teachers create their own recordings, in which print books are read live online or reading activities appear on social media.

Rita Felski (2020) in her work on attachment to works of art, also advocates for a midlevel perspective which deals with the interfaces between works and people, arguing that they ‘are key to clarifying why literature and art are worth attending to’ (p. 144). In this study, adjusting the perspective to this mid-level will not only achieve greater understanding of how these reading activities unfold on a practical level, but will allow an exploration of how meaning is made between the reader and the work and the forms of information that connect them.

This thesis suggests that this ‘meso’ level can be achieved by taking the practice as the unit of analysis, which allows for scrutiny of print artefacts in online environments, the digital intermediaries that exert power and the blurring of individual roles when reading in online contexts. As previously detailed, this study will employ practice theory to take into account relationality between people and also things. In addition, it will take a socio-material approach to account for people and things within the practice. This is detailed within the theory and methodology chapter which follows this literature review.

Barnett (2020) argues that in order to gain a better understanding of reading and textual experiences in digital environments, there is a need for a more nuanced understanding of the ‘material and infrastructural conditions of these spaces’ (p. 55). Van Dijk (2014) suggests a solution by moving away from giving exclusive attention to objects and formats and instead towards a study of paratexts. This study will couple the information literacy perspective, already described within this literature review, with a focus on paratexts. This methodological manoeuvre is suggested in order to depart from the idea that reading is bound by a single form of artefact or technology (Tattersall Wallin, 2021). The scholarly overemphasis on eBooks vs physical books highlights an area which requires alternative framings of digital reading experiences. In this study, the sensitising concept of paratexts does this, enabling an exploration of new media forms of reading and the relational nature between people and material objects. This literature review will now explore the concept of paratexts and how it has changed over time and across disciplines.

2.6.6 Paratexts[1]

The seminal text on paratexts was written by narratologist Genette (1997). His term 'paratexts' describes 'what enables a text to become a book and to be offered as such to its readers' (p. 1) occupying a 'zone without any hard and fast boundary' (p. 2). This might include the cover, the back cover copy and dedications, in short anything that frames and positions the central text for the reader. Describing paratexts as a 'threshold' or a 'vestibule', he elaborates on the idea of the zone where they reside as one 'not only of transition, but also of *transaction* [his italics]' which serves to provide a 'better reception for the text and a more pertinent reading of it' (Genette, 1997 p. 2). Genette divides his analysis of paratexts into peritexts and epitexts. Peritexts are materially attached to the book: for example, the cover; title page; back cover copy. Epitexts are described as anything not materially appended to the text: for example, publishers' press releases; authors' diaries. He demarcates what counts as a paratext as anything that the 'author or his associates accepts responsibility for' (p. 9). Genette (1997) links paratexts to action arguing that a paratext can not only 'communicate a piece of sheer information - the name of the author, for example, or the date of publication' (p. 10 – 11) but that they can also exert what he calls an 'illocutionary force' (p. 11). This illocutionary force 'make[s] known an intention, or an interpretation by the author and/or the publisher' (p. 11) in this way communicating information in a way which prompts action on the part of the reader. In terms of information literacy, this paratextual zone of transition and transaction can be conceptualised as part of the information landscape from which intersubjective and subjective understandings can be drawn in relation to meaning-making and identity.

[1] In the Information Studies field there is also the emerging study of paradata which is defined as 'In the project, data about data creation and manipulation processes is referred to as paradata' (Huvila and Ekman, 2024 p. 26) which is considered by this study to be distinct from the concept of paratexts.

The concept of paratexts has gained momentum in the humanities and the social sciences (Astrom, 2014) and moved beyond print books (which were Genette's original subject). Birke and Christ (2013), writing about digitized narratives, build upon Genette's work which focused on the primarily interpretive function of the paratext, by fleshing out their commercial and navigational purposes. The interpretive function directs the reader into certain ways of understanding and reading the text. The commercial function promotes and advertises the book. The navigational function 'guide[s] the reader's reception in a more mechanical sense' (Birke and Christ, 2013 p. 68). This might include the contents page or running heads. Birke and Christ (2013) suggest that Genette did not linger on the navigational, because when considering a physical codex, successfully handled by readers for centuries, a user manual was not necessary, but when moving to new formats of digitized texts, it was (p. 68).

Birke and Christ (2013) argue that paratexts can only be usefully applied when examining a distinct physical object, giving the example of a CD-ROM. They contend that the concept of paratext loses its analytic value in interlinked digital environments because the paratexts become 'increasingly difficult to isolate or identify' and therefore leave 'scholars at an impasse' declaring 'all is paratext', just as Genette warned (Birke and Christ, 2013 p. 80).

On the other hand, McCracken's work identifies how 'paratexts can no longer be studied as singular fixed objects', but rather 'exist temporally and spatially within particular viewing practices' (2013 p. 106). For example, she asks 'How does the reader's perception that he or she is reading on a cool, ultra-modern device that may carry the large cultural capital of the Apple logo affect the perception and meaning of the text?' (2013 p. 109). She extends Genette's peritext and epitext, firstly with a 'centripetal vector' that allows the reader to delve into the text, for example, modifying the font size or navigating within the text. This is

accompanied by a ‘centrifugal vector’ which draws readers outside the text to, for example, blogs or websites (2013 p. 106-7).

The study of paratexts has also spread beyond reading and books into film and television studies, gaming studies and media and communication studies (Skare, 2020) and has been applied to films, TV shows, trailers promos, games and merchandise. As this happened, the accompanying technological developments of the time meant that the lines between authors/readers/reviewers, and the boundaries of what constituted a text, moved. Scholars built upon Genette’s foundational definition to fit with new media (Lunenfeld, 2000; Paling, 2002; Stanitzek, 2005). Gray, a film studies scholar, opened the way for the study of paratexts created by others – not just the author or publisher, but to include audiences and distributors too. This was enthusiastically supported by scholarly work (Caldwell, 2011; Birke and Christ, 2013; Van Dijk, 2014; Mittell, 2015; Berglund and Linkis, 2022) reflecting the explosion of digital, transmedia and ephemeral content generated not just by corporations (Jenkins, 2008) but also users and fans (Geraghty, 2015; Pesce and Noto, 2016).

This move away from the authorised creators and towards user-generated content also led to scholarly questions about what constitutes the text and what constitutes the paratext. Van Dijk (2014), Brookey and Gray (2017) and Consalvo (2017) have argued that what constitutes the text and what constitutes the paratext changes depending on the opinion of different communities and at different times. For example, Consalvo (2017) outlines how, whilst Games Studies scholars consider the game to be the central text, for many Communications Studies scholars, a game is a paratext appended to a big budget film. Genette’s definition of paratexts, which sees them as separate entities from the text, became increasingly difficult to reconcile in digitally mediated environments where texts are not contained within bounded objects. Gray suggests a resolution to this by using Barthes (1977) to draw a distinction between the work and the text:

> where the text is the entity in society and culture, not "just" the aesthetic entity. Using that definition, we should see the paratext as outside the work, but when you put the work and paratexts together, you get the text. The "para" is deceptive because it might suggest it's outside the text when, in fact, I think paratexts are intrinsic parts of the text as social and cultural unit. - Gray in Brookey and Gray (2017 p. 102)

Barthes explains that the text 'decants' the work gathering 'it up as play, activity, production, practice'' (Barthes, 1977 p. 162 -3). Conceiving of the text in this way aligns with the standpoints of this study which considers that 'forms effect meaning' (Mckenzie, 1999 p. 13); that takes a sociocultural view of information literacy, and argues that taking the practice as the unit of analysis is a useful line of enquiry.

This reconception of the text led to Gray extending Genette's definition of paratexts. He retains Genette's understanding that paratexts 'establish a perimeter around a text, so that they become our first port of entry—the "airlock," as Genette poses it—acclimatizing us to the text' (Gray, 2010 p. 205) demarcating these as 'entryway paratexts'. In addition, Gray's conception of the work plus the paratext making up the text allows him to move away from the idea of the paratext as the threshold or vestibule to the text and define an additional paratext – the 'in media res' paratext. 'In media res' paratexts are 'ones which are encountered after "entering" the text' (Gray, 2010 p. 35). He uses the example of 'last week on…' or 'previously on…' segments that are incorporated into many television serial episodes, arguing that for new viewers these act as entryway paratexts, but for returning viewers they act as reminders, 'designed to focus attention on specific actions, themes, or issues' (Gray, 2010, p. 43). For example, reminding the viewers of a character's specific actions several episodes previously will shape the viewer's interpretation of that character's actions in the episode being viewed. He suggests that in media res paratexts offer 'frames through which we can interpret the text at hand, and subtly or radically inflecting our reading

accordingly. In effect, they build themselves into the text, becoming inseparable from it' (Gray, 2010 p. 43). He argues that these in media res paratexts 'flow between the gaps of textual exhibition' thereby 'working to police certain reading strategies in media res' (Gray, 2010 p. 23).

Using the work of a film studies scholar to think about paratexts including in media res paratexts is potentially useful in a study that investigates types of reading where video and audio recording are created by family members or teachers; where print books are read on screen or reading activities appear on social media channels.

Recent scholarly studies embrace the 'paratext paradise' of the internet (Rodríguez-Ferrándiz, 2017 p. 170). In the field of Digital Literary Studies, Simone Murray (2015) has argued that what appears about a book online, which she terms the 'digital literary sphere' provides insight into our understandings of literature, authors, publishers and readers. This sphere includes 'book review websites, self-cataloguing library networks, author home pages, publishers' portals, online book retailers, archived writer's festival sessions and recorded celebrity author readings' (Murray, 2015 p. 312). She argues that 'blog tours, online writers' festivals and social media based book clubs constitute digital paratexts' (Murray, 2015, p. 334). Elsewhere studies into paratexts have been conducted into the content of twitter feeds (Völcker, 2020) and YouTube channels (Astrom, 2014).

Van Dijk's (2014) study takes a post-structuralist approach and analyses the distributor-created paratexts such as search engine results, which she characterised as 'dynamic digital paratexts' (p. 40) 'that cluster around the text and become part of it even if there is no authorial consent' (p. 24) and can include elements of the text that go beyond the textual to embrace typefaces, images, sound, interface and software (p. 25) echoing work in information literacy which finds that epistemic modalities of information are not always

textual (Cox, McKinney and Goodale, 2017). Tully Barnett (2020) suggests that for Van Dijk these digital elements are part of 'the production of the electronic literary object's meaning' (p. 50). In the same vein, Johnson (2017) explores the paratextual role played by Facebook's 'Trending Topics' and Skare (2020) points out that it has become necessary to take different media platforms into account. She uses the example of Netflix recommended viewing which is based on previous viewing habits to deliver personalised paratexts to users (p. 514). This highlights the fact that in digital settings paratexts can be contingent: they can change at any time, which echoes the work of McCracken (2013), Van Dijk (2014) and Brookey and Gray (2017) as well as sociocultural conceptions of information literacy as situated and contingent (Tuominen, Savolainen and Talja, 2005; Lloyd, 2017).

Kirschenbaum (2008) argues that interfaces should not be regarded as just a medium through which we study artifacts of other media. Similarly, Brookey and Gray contend that interfaces are 'part and parcel with' paratexts, considering that they can be 'organizational systems that arrange how we interact with the text' (Brookey and Gray, 2017 p. 104). Barnett (2020) proposes the term 'hyperparatextuality as a way of looking beyond the digital paratext to consider the distributed state of immersive reading in digitized and read-in-browser environments' (p. 43). According to Barnett (2020) we need to consider the paratexts which are within the frame of the reading platform. This matters because:

> Platforms impose or cohere practices, habits, tendencies of interaction and, ultimately, of reading through their infrastructural and design decisions and through the social networks that form around them bringing with them communities of practice with established and evolving behaviours and ways of interacting (Barnett, 2020, p. 47).

Relatedly, scholarship has moved towards considering how paratexts operate in situ. Volker (2020) suggests that texts be considered as being in a continuous state of productivity

in which paratexts provide meanings which are fluid and negotiated discursively (p. 2). Barnett (2019) opens up a new materialist and feminist science and technology studies perspective which argues that 'the materiality of things, sites, people, and processes' (p. 311): the space where the experience takes place, needs to be taken into account, echoing Murray's (2022) call for a meso level of analysis. Uricchio (2016) proposes the 'interactive user' who does not just encounter, interpret and make meaning from texts, but pushes through to creating new and variant texts, assembling disparate textual elements into new wholes and creating unique routes through the text as a reader enabled pathway (p. 156).

Genette's core concept of paratexts and these attendant scholarly developments are important to take into consideration in relation to the texts used in children's shared digital reading practices. They influence how these practices are constructed, enabled and constrained as well as how meaning is made. Producers (in whatever form they take) can 'use paratexts to try and move audiences towards or away from particular readings' (Brookey and Gray, 2017 p. 106). Rather than comparing two reading formats or objects, this study instead considers what frames and positions the work from the point of view of the users, even when that work is within a dispersed form. Exploring the role of paratexts and texts, which enable transitions and transactions provides direction for this research, which focuses on the relations between things in shared and digitally mediated reading activities. The study of paratexts and texts provides fertile ground for an exploration of information literacy practices from a sociocultural point of view, taking the materiality of the text and of the physical object of the book or reading device into account.

Paratexts is a term which is used in the Information Studies field, but it tends to remain on the fringes of analysis (Francke, Sundin and Limberg, 2011; Rasmussen Pennington, 2016; Gursoy, Wickett and Feinberg, 2018; Harviainen and Rapp, 2018; Francke, 2022). There is work where paratexts are used more centrally to explore the promotion of books (Lluch,

Tabernero-Sala and Calvo-Valios, 2015), digital documents (Skare, 2021) and authors (Desrochers and Pecoskie, 2014). The concept of paratexts has also been used in the Information Studies field conceived of as an informational tool (Pecoskie and Desrochers, 2013) and this quality has led to scholars recommending that paratexts can support the teaching of information literacy (Gross and Latham, 2017 p. 116). However there is scope for paratexts to be used in a more fulsome way in the Information Studies field to explore how readers understand digital means of reading, as demonstrated in work in the cognate discipline of Publishing Studies (e.g. Dietz, 2019) as well as what shapes and contextualises information.

Although paratexts have been the subject of study in research on picturebooks (Nikolajeva and Scott, 2006; Martinez, Stier and Falcon, 2016; Pantaleo, 2017), eBooks for children (Stewart, 2010; Al-Yagout and Nikolajva, 2015) picture book apps (Gómez-Díaz and García-Rodríguez, 2018), transmedia picturebooks (Serafini, Kachorsky and Aguilera, 2015), transmedia fiction for young readers (Nottingham-Martin, 2014) and films for young people (Kummerling-Meibauer, 2013), this body of scholarly work focuses on close reading of the text rather than analysing the reader's reception of the paratext. This study suggests that coupling the shared digital reading practice as the unit of analysis with the sensitising concept of paratexts will facilitate an exploration of what enables and constrains the enactment of information literacy practices related to children and their families' shared digital reading activities. This will allow an examination of unique pathways, variant texts and mediums, and relationality, situatedness and context to be taken into account.

This literature review will now explore the final trend in the body of work on children's shared digital reading which dominates research. This relates to attainment, skills, abilities and outcomes. The next section reviews the literature in this area. Following the review, it suggests that employing a sociocultural conception of information literacy, that considers

information literacy as something which is made in the moment and where embodied and affective elements come to matter, is a useful direction to diversify reading research.

2.6.7 Reading for attainment

Reviewing the literature reveals an abundance of studies which measure the learning, attainment, skills and abilities of children when reading. This is not surprising considering that much of the research stems from the Education field where fostering skills is the central aim of the discipline. However, this study considers that reading is not always something done for educational purposes and that it is a practice in its own right with intrinsic value (Hampson Lundh, 2013). This study also suggests that skills, attainment and outcomes are etic frameworks established by adults and what children value in the reading activity might differ from this. The strong focus on attainment addresses what adults want from children's reading and what matters to adult researchers. This highlights again the issue of power which is inherent in children's shared digital reading practices and often takes place with adults present. The prevalence of these adult values emphasises the need for research that decentres the adult perspective and is designed to allow children to put what matters to them across, freely and without the constraint of adult aims. Conceptualising information literacy as a way of knowing allows questions about what is being learnt in these reading activities to come to the fore where 'attempts to define the phenomenon with reference to a generic suite of skills' should be abandoned (Lloyd, 2010b p. 182).

The interest in reading aloud to children via digital means preceded the pandemic. Research based in Computing and Technology Studies conducted at the Nokia Research Centre (Raffle *et al.*, 2011 and Raffle *et al*., 2010), found that digital storytimes were more engaging than traditional video chats. Gaudreau *et al*'s 2020 study, situated in Psychology, also investigated engagement. It asked how dialogic reading via video chat compared to

traditional forms of book reading to promote story comprehension and vocabulary learning. The findings of this quantitative study found benefits in different forms of reading. This study used experimenters as the readers rather than family members or people known to children either personally or through media exposure. Gaudreau *et al*'s (2020) study suggests further research could explore additional benefits, including the emotional elements, of reading beyond skills acquisition (p. 13), which this study aims to do by taking a sociocultural approach to information literacy.

The pandemic transition to home-learning provoked a wave of research into the effects on children's attainment relating to reading. Studies included longitudinal ones that assessed reading performance (Förster *et al.*, 2023) and effects of interventions like online reading camps (Weiss *et al.*, 2022) and interventions related to the literacy learning of at-risk primary students (Dunn *et al.*, 2023). Bao *et al.*, (2020) found that children who were read to everyday during the Covid-19 closures better maintained their reading ability and the habit of reading for pleasure and that being read to aloud 'provided "book language" which is higher in sentence complexity and school vocabulary than conversations and oral storytelling' (p. 8). Whilst these studies focus on outcomes, they do not explore the detail of what is being done in these reading activities and how ways of doing things influence the outcomes: a key factor to consider in promoting all-important shared reading practices

Steiner, Hindin and Rizzuto (2022) linked success at school to the parent-child reading relationship at home. Rosendo *et al.* (2023), in their study of Portuguese elementary school children's reading fluency, found that parental and family involvement mattered and Li and Lin (2023) found that grandparents were a significant factor in developing bilingual language opportunities. These findings reinforce the necessity of a study which centres on relationships as has been argued for earlier in this review. There is value in centring relations

rather than seeing them only as a way to promote the central concern of skills acquisition, as reported in the above studies.

The studies into children's reading in the pandemic referenced here all draw on adult centred 'social and institutional framings of reading activities' (Lundh, 2013 p. 22) which may not actually be connected to how these activities are shaped and experienced. They also, like the cognitive constructionist strain of information literacy scholarship, consider knowledge and learning to be something which is 'out there' and can be acquired by an individual. This, Lundh (2016) argues, has consequences for how research is designed, formulated and put into practice and not least for how the research subjects are considered. This study, which takes the alternative sociocultural tack, therefore needs to theoretically take a position that does not impose etic theories or hypothesis onto the object of research. Additionally, it needs to take a theoretical stance that allows for an openness to questioning both how the research is designed and the impact of the adult researcher upon that design. It must do this to understand that the researcher's influence over the research may impact upon the findings of that research. Employing constructivist grounded theory and agential realism provide such an approach. These are detailed in the theory and methodology chapter which follows this literature review.

Lundh, Hedemark and Lindskold (2022) emphasise that to understand reading practices it is useful to explore empirical settings without trying to make an assessment based on a perceived goal or normative assumption about reading practices. Taking the sociocultural perspective of information literacy's approach to learning, this work suggests that skills 'do not evolve in a vacuum' (Tuominen, Savolainen and Talja, 2005 p. 334) and as such they cannot be explored as a product in and of itself. Rather knowledge and learning involves 'the co-construction of situated meanings and takes place in the networks of actors

and artifacts' (Tuominen, Savolainen and Talja, 2005 p. 338). Lloyd (2010a) argues that researchers should consider:

> knowing-in-action, which acts as a source of nuanced meanings, and of tacit and contingent knowledge. Our bodies represent the visible manifestation of our alignment and identity and reflect knowing in action (Conf Proc, no page number)

This research takes this approach to exploring knowledge and learning as it occurs in practice, homing in on the details of what participation entails and with attention paid to the corporeal modality of information which takes into account reading as embodied.

2.6.8 Reading is embodied

Scholars of reading have found that readers often talk about their bodily responses to reading (McLaughlin, 2015; Kuzmičová *et al.*, 2018; Mangen, Olivier and Velay, 2019; Rothbauer and Cedeira Serantes, 2022). Scholars in Information Studies point out that there are too few studies which consider the body in shaping information practices (Lloyd, 2010a; Given *et al.*, 2016b; Hedemark and Lindberg, 2018). There have been calls beyond Information Studies for research which explores how literacy is experienced as an embodied experience (Rowsell, 2014); which attend to the embodied and affective aspects of shared reading including the implications of screens (Yuill and Martin, 2016) and to understand the impact of technological change on the embodied reading experience (Mangen and van der Weel, 2016). This includes how people's bodies encounter the material objects within these reading practices (McLaughlin, 2015; Kuzmičová *et al.*, 2018; Rothbauer and Cedeira Serantes, 2022). This study follows the precedent set in Information Studies by Hedemark & Lindberg (2018) who, in their study of the literacy practices of pre-school infants participating in library storytime, focused on the corporeal interactions and embodied knowledge in the practice for all participants including the pre-school infants. They found that corporeal

aspects were meaningful dimensions when considering librarians knowledge relating to young children's library activities.

Employing the corporeal modality of information is threefold: firstly it requires understanding that bodies possess knowledge, secondly that they produce information and knowledge and thirdly that they can be read by others and so become a means of disseminating information (Lloyd, 2010a). Considering reading as embodied challenges the 'longstanding separation in Western thinking of mind and body' (Kress, 2003, p. 171) and aligns to the theoretical claim that knowledge is situated in the body and in specific situations and environments (Burkitt, 1999; Chambers, 2006; Pink, 2013; Storm-Mathisen, 2016).

Methodologically, attending to the body as a site of information, via visual methods, is also valuable when considering young children who may not or cannot use verbal skills to express their reaction to the text (Nikolajeva, 2013 p. 250) and where the words of adults may not provide adequate information for them. This focus away from language is concurrent with studies into children's shared reading of physical books with parents (Cutler, 2020) and grandparents (Kenner *et al*., 2007) where touch, gesture and gaze were found significant, as well as in the comparative studies and discussion of print and digital reading (Yuill and Martin, 2016; Kucirkova, 2019a). As a result, this study must attend to the methodological challenge of attending to the corporeal in a partially socially distanced research environment, which will be detailed in the research design chapter.

Attending to the affective elements of shared digital reading activities also requires attending to the body. This situating of the body within material, social relations means that emotions take on a facilitating role as the 'natural expression of human subjectivity which unavoidably is also the expression of the materiality of being together' (O'Loughlin, 1998 p. 282). Lyon and Barablet suggest that the 'formation of emotion is quite simply a relation of

embodied agents' (Lyon and Barablet, 1994 p. 282). In short, to take the body into account we have to take emotion into account too. Thus to contribute to Gaudreau *et al.*'s (2020) earlier cited suggestion that emotion could be attended to in studies of children video conferencing, following this line of theoretical thought it follows that attention needs to be paid to the body. Hennion (2005) makes the connection that if the body is the minimal medium for our feelings (Merleau Ponty, 1962), 'then it is the body which gives substance to outside objects through contact, apprehension, the senses' (Hennion, 2005 p. 139).

Scholarly consideration of affect when reading concurs with the above. Affect is constructed out of locally available information and the environment (Mackey, 2022 p. 394) which again links to a sociocultural conception of information literacy. It is 'created in situational moments of intensity' (Hermansson and Olin-Scheller, 2022 p. 331) and as such, it is useful to consider the processes of reading and how they are constituted. The 'rich clutter of people, objects and emotions' are all factors in this creation (Mackey, 2016 p. 167). Rowsell (2014) suggests that this requires a move to 'more careful, detailed accounts of individuals in the midst of meaning-making across virtual, play-based media-driven situations and contexts' (p. 118). Similarly Mangen, Olivier and Velay, (2019) argue that there is too little known about aspects of reading including 'the ways in which digitization may affect emotional and motivational aspects of reading, and empirical research addressing such questions is much needed' (p. 9).

In tackling ideas around affect, it is useful to establish how affect might be considered in this study. Sara Ahmed (2014, 2020) in her scholarly work on affect conceives of it as 'sticky' arguing that 'affect is what sticks, or what sustains or preserves connection between ideas, values, and objects' (Ahmed, 2020, p. 29). This conception of affect has its roots in Hochschild's work ([1983] 2012). Hochschild argues that 'feelings are not stored 'inside us' and they are not independent acts of management' (p. 17). Instead, she argues that the act of

feeling – both getting in touch with feeling and trying to feel – 'become part of the process that makes the thing we get in touch with, or the thing we manage, into a feeling or emotion. In managing feeling, we contribute to the creation of it.' (p. 17-18). Ahmed therefore defines stickiness as being about 'what objects do to other objects' involving 'a transference of affect' shaped by the contact we have with others and therefore shaped by action – and in this way affect is seen as 'a relation of doing' (Ahmed, 2014 p. 91). To explore affect in these shared digital reading activities, therefore, requires a theoretical framework that focusses on the actions and processes which take place when reading. This will be explored in the theoretical chapter that follows this literature review.

Framing these shared digital reading practices through a sociocultural information literacy lens, which draws on the corporeal modality of information, will allow a view of the body as the site, source and means of disseminating information, providing valuable insights in this research. Taking the practice as the unit of analysis takes into account the need for bodily interaction with material objects, places and between other people to be fully explored.

These complex relational practices require methodological innovations to ensure that 'the complexity of these contexts in which children move in these hybrid spaces is captured' (Marsh, Mascheroni, *et al.*, 2017 p. 39). This literature review has highlighted the need for children's perspectives on a practice which is understood to be social and the product of the interactions of a community as well as with material objects. It also suggests that the relationality between these things can be accounted for by considering the body as a source of information and by taking the reading activity, conceived of as an information literacy practice, as the unit of analysis. As a result of the findings of this literature review this study will employ data collection methods that include semi-structured interviews with children but to avoid reliance on discursive data (Storm-Mathisen, 2016), this study will employ

participatory video methods. Observational and visual methods, which have a tradition in Information Studies, are discussed in the next section.

2.7 Visual methods in Information Studies

Scholarship which deals with young children's interactions with digital media strongly emphasises employing methodological innovations including observational and interactional data collection (Chaudron, 2015). These methods can capture complex contexts (Marsh, Mascheroni, *et al.*, 2017) and allow for the examination of situated and embodied practices (Storm-Mathisen, 2016) as they take place within the flow of everyday life (Livingstone and Blum-Ross, 2017). This trend is echoed in Information Studies where the complexity of the information environment and experiences require understandings of multiple modalities of information (Lundh and Alexandersson, 2012) including the social, epistemic and corporeal (Hicks, 2018a; Hicks and Lloyd, 2018). Using visual methods is key if information literacy is understood to centre on multiple modes of information.

There is a growing body of work in Information Studies which uses visual methods. Lundh's (2011) groundbreaking study using video data observing pupils in a primary school, was followed by further observational studies (Foss *et al.*, 2012) including the use of video (Lundh and Alexandersson, 2012; Given *et al.*, 2016b). More recently visual methods have been used in ways which encourage research participants to explore their own information experiences through use of photo elicitation (Hicks, 2018; Lloyd and Wilkinson, 2019) including asking parents of young children to report on children's activities (Barriage, 2016). Most recently Barriage's (2021) research developed an innovative participatory multi-method approach including photo elicitation which asked children aged 5 – 7 to report on their information practices of their everyday interests. When considering the importance of representing the experiences of users, as this literature review has, the need for participatory

methods also comes to the fore. Hicks and Lloyd (2018) suggest that ‘few researchers have explored how video could be used as a participatory method rather than as a documentary method’ (p. 238). This study utilises participatory video data to allow for the perspectives of children and their families of their information experiences of shared digital reading.

Video and visual data collection with young children and their complex information experiences and practices comes with a set of unique challenges (Barriage, 2016, 2021; Barriage and Hicks, 2020). There is minimal literature on the subject (Yamada-Rice, 2017 p. 71) to the point where children’s opinions risk being excluded because the perceived difficulties of video research with young children abound (Barriage, 2022 p. 146). In particular, information and consent procedures involved in taking visual data of young children present ethical challenges which require ‘research creativity and perseverance’ (Agosto, 2019 p. 115). Barriage (2022) suggests that ‘research endeavours should focus on methodological innovations that encourage the direct participation of young children in the research process’ (p. 154-5) are needed. Yamada-Rice (2017), in her book on using visual methods with young children, suggests that social scientists’ understanding of visual methods might be furthered by ‘considering knowledge deriving from other third sector organisations that work with children’ (p. 83). This study, therefore, takes up this suggestion and draws upon the experiences of the researcher as a former children’s publishing professional, to employ methods which will open out the research experience to children and their families. These methods are detailed in the research design chapter of this thesis. This chapter concludes with the introduction of the research questions that frame this study and the objectives which have been informed by this review of the literature.

2.8 Research questions and objectives

2.8.1 Research questions

Having assessed the literature in Information Studies and cognate fields, the primary question that focuses this research is:

How did young children aged four- to eight-years-old and their families experience information literacy practices relating to shared digital reading in their homes during social distancing?

The secondary questions are:

- In what ways were information landscapes related to shared digital reading constructed?
- What enabled and constrained the ways in which these information literacy practices were enacted?
- How was meaning made from the resources at the disposal of the children and their families?

2.8.2 Objectives

To meet the aims of the research questions the study has the following objectives:

- To employ research methods that surface the social, epistemic and corporeal conditions, including material aspects, in which these situated reading practices took place.
- To develop and employ innovative approaches to inform a research design to work with young children and their families to centre the child's perspective and enabling them to become active co-researchers.

- To develop new knowledge about shared reading practices of young children by exploring sensitising concepts from the data which could lead to new avenues of exploration in this area and the generation of new theory.

2.9 Chapter conclusion

This review, and the introductory chapter which preceded it, argues that the socially distanced nature of the pandemic meant that families, libraries and teachers drew on the information sources available to them in that context to create cogent shared digital reading activities. It argues that taking an information literacy perspective will provide a valuable framework to explore the construction of these practices. It will do this through the concept of information landscape and the social, corporeal and epistemic modalities of information to explore what enables and what constrained these practices. It suggests there are gaps in reading research where children's perspectives should be taken into account. In exploring this, attention is drawn to how creative research methods need to be employed to ensure ethical rigour and rich data collection when working with children. However, it also recognises the fundamentally social, situated and relational nature of these reading practices including the importance of the influence of others and that reading in the proximity of others needs research attention. It suggests that social information should be attended to, to understand how reading is socially, historically and politically shaped. This review also points out the dominance of studies in current reading research which focus on comparing eBooks to physical reading. Instead, it suggests exploring other forms of digitally mediated shared reading which are dispersed across mediums and platforms. It argues that a focus should be placed on material forms of information, including in the form of paratexts. It argues that paratexts frame narrative works across mediums and platforms and shape the reading experience. Lastly, it explores how the field is dominated by research which looks at interventions and skills acquisitions. Instead, this research takes stance that knowledge is

made through relational means: knowing-in-action and asks *what* is being learnt rather than a priori. It suggests that a fruitful area of study is to attend to the corporeal information within the landscape. A non-evaluative approach will allow for context and emotion to be attended to and to explore how meaning is made in situ.

Having outlined the research aims, objectives and questions, this thesis now moves to the theory and methodology chapter. This chapter will explore the theoretical basis for constructivist grounded theory, Karen Barad's agential realism and practice theory. In this thesis the theory and methodology chapter precedes the chapter on research design because the theory and methodology, as well as information literacy and paratexts, are employed to inform, not just the analysis of the data, but also the research design of this study.

Chapter 3: Theory and methodology

3.1 Chapter overview

This chapter provides an overview of the theoretical and methodological perspectives that are applied in this study to explore children and their families shared digital reading practices during a period of social distancing. The chapter starts by giving a brief overview of grounded theory and its theoretical underpinnings before introducing a constructivist approach to grounded theory which forms the basis of this study. It goes on to outline sensitising theories of sociomateriality, agential realism and practice theory which guide the study: concepts which are defined as 'a starting place for analysis' (McFeetors, 2016 p. 4). These sensitising theories inform the methods used in this study, as well as explaining how the findings of the study will be analysed and explained.

3.2 Grounded Theory overview

Grounded theory is an influential and wide-reaching research method (Clarke, 2007; Bryant, 2019) which is 'first and foremost a mode of analysis of largely qualitative research data' (Clarke, 2007 p. 424). The method aims to develop middle range theories (Flick, 2019 p. 3) which are 'grounded' in the data and the term 'grounded theory' can also refer to the theoretical product: the grounded theory produced from the data analysed (Charmaz and Bryant, 2016a; Flick, 2019). The grounded theory method follows the principles of openness,

considering that ‘all is data’ (Glaser, 1998 p. 8) and trusting in emergence, which is to say that theories are built from the data up, rather than imposing extant ideas, sometimes referred to as ‘forcing the data’ (Glaser, 1992 p. 122). This is a key aim of this research which, as detailed within the literature review seeks to understand the activities of the children and their families rather than to test extant theories. In order to fulfil these aims the method involves simultaneous data collection and analysis.

A discussion of grounded theory takes its place in this theory and methodology chapter, because the development of the method is interlaced with ‘larger currents in social scientific inquiry’ (Charmaz, 2014 p. 5) and wider questions of paradigm. Paradigm is defined as ‘the basic belief system or worldview that guides the investigator’ (Guba and Lincoln, 1994 p. 105) and which are ‘based on ontological, epistemological and methodological assumptions’ (Guba and Lincoln, 1994 p. 107). A range of researchers subscribing to different paradigms can use the grounded theory method, which is ‘transportable across epistemological and ontological gulfs’ (Charmaz, 2014 p. 12) meaning that the epistemological and ontological stance of the researcher will colour and shape their research. In order to unpack these differences, this chapter will give a brief overview of the three types of grounded theory and the paradigms which influenced them. It will cover classical grounded theory as developed by Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss in 1967, the alternative approach developed by Strauss with and advanced by Corbin and constructivist grounded theory as developed by Kathy Charmaz, which is used in this study.

3.2.1 The context of Grounded Theory development

By the mid-1960s social science research in the USA was coming to be dominated by quantitative research which was swiftly developing increasingly sophisticated research methods (Charmaz, 2014). Defining research in positivist terms meant prioritising replication

of research designs and the search for verifiable quantitative knowledge through the use of valid instruments and technical procedures. This positivistic bent meant that research questions which did not use positivist research designs became neglected (Charmaz and Bryant, 2016b). Qualitative research was viewed as impressionistic and imprecise with a limited foundation of validity. At most, field research was seen as a preliminary exercise through which researchers could refine their research designs before the real quantitative research could begin (Charmaz, 2000 p. 511). Theory became largely divorced from empirical research, and when it was used, existing theories were tested by using hypotheses. As a result, new theories were rarely constructed.

3.2.2 Classical Grounded Theory

In 1967 sociologists Barney G. Glaser and Anselm L. Strauss published *The Discovery of Grounded Theory,* which was the culmination of earlier research and writing on nascent grounded theory done in conjunction with PhD student Jeanne Quint (Bryant, 2018). Their ground-breaking book offered an exacting framework for qualitative analysis which could dependably represent perspectives of people studied in their own terms as expressed by their basic social processes (Clarke, 2007 p. 425). In *Discovery* they stressed the need to develop novel theories rather than corroborating existing ones. Researchers were encouraged to go into the field and gather data without guidance from existing theory (Charmaz and Bryant, 2016b) and to begin data analysis as it was collected. This challenged traditional deductive approaches and proposed instead an inductive approach which moves through detailing individual cases and up into more abstract and conceptual levels (Charmaz and Bryant, 2016b p. 19). As a result, being grounded in the data was paramount. Data too became critical to the credibility of grounded theory, in that it allowed researchers to present their methodological toolbox as a scientifically respectable practice which could hold its own against the dominant quantitative tradition and crucially allowed for the generation of new theories (Charmaz,

2000, 2014; Charmaz and Bryant, 2016b). Their work was revolutionary in countering the dominance of positivistic quantitative research by producing a persuasive and valid argument for and approach to qualitative research.

3.2.3 Divergence of Grounded Theory

By the late 1980s Glaser and Strauss's conceptions of grounded theory had diverged. Strauss proposed modifications with his publication of *Qualitative Analysis for Social Scientists* (1987) and his collaborative work with Juliet Corbin, *Basics of Qualitative Research* (Strauss and Corbin, 1990, 1998, Corbin and Strauss, 2008). These modifications, in part designed to make grounded theory more accessible and to improve the quality of research, involved applying additional technical procedures which allowed for greater recognition of context, structures and power. Glaser refuted these additions on the basis that these elements should emerge as relevant categories or codes in the data (Clarke, 2007 p. 428; Charmaz, 2000, p. 512). Corbin and Strauss also moved to a post-positivist stance, in which they attempted to give voice to their respondents, acknowledging conflicts of opinion between researcher and researched (Charmaz, 2000). Strass and Corbin's strand of grounded theory favoured clarifying concepts by extending data collection and allocating it to already developed concepts. In this way, the inductive approach of classical grounded theory moved to an inductive-deductive approach (Flick, 2019 p. 8). Glaser criticised this form of grounded theory, accusing Strauss of 'forcing the data' through the use of preconceived categories, analytic questions, hypotheses and methodological techniques (Charmaz, 2000 p. 512), resulting in conceptual description rather than true grounded theory (Glaser, 1992).

However a further criticism was levelled at both Glaser and Strauss's versions of grounded theory which, ironically for a method which had challenged positivism, drew attention to its own positivist foundations (Charmaz, 2014). Despite Strauss and later Strauss

together with Corbin's moves towards a post-positivism, both they and Glaser took positions imbued with positivism and its objectivist underpinnings (Guba and Lincoln, 1994; Charmaz, 2000; Clarke, 2007). Both forms of the method 'assume an external objective reality, aim towards unbiased data collection [and] propose a set of theoretical procedures and espouses verification' (Charmaz, 2000 p. 510). Both write as distanced experts, engaging in 'silent authorship' (Charmaz, 2000 p. 513). Even the notions of 'discovery' and 'emergence' suggest that the data and relevant facts are 'out there' waiting to be collected (Flick, 2019 p. 7) and that they could be collected by any given researcher with the necessary skills (Bryant, 2019 p. 18). Despite Glaser and Strauss's work recognising their research participants' constructions of their realities, they 'adamantly maintained the view that researchers' expert knowledge superseded that of their research subjects' (Charmaz and Bryant, 2016a p. 12) with Glaser proclaiming 'the epistemology is irrelevant' (Glaser, 2007 p. 27). All of this ran counter to a strong interpretivist current running through social scientific inquiry at the time. This chapter will now explore that alternative paradigm and how grounded theory was adapted to encompass it by Kathy Charmaz.

3.2.5 An epistemological shift

At around the same time that Glaser and Strauss were pushing back on positivist quantitative research, a movement which posed fundamental questions about the sociology of knowledge was burgeoning in academic scholarship. Several landmark titles appeared (Goffman, 1959; Kuhn, 1962; Berger and Luckmann, 1966; Garfinkel, 1967) which provided a critique of positivism and challenged its understanding of knowledge creation in the form of central questions such as 'who produces what kind of knowledge? For whom? Under what conditions? What other kinds are eclipsed in the process?' (Clarke, 2007 p. 429). Garfinkel, (1967) and Berger and Luckmann (1966) argued that people constructed their realities through their everyday actions, suggesting that data was not something fixed and 'out there'.

Kuhn (1962) coined the term ‘normal science’ which described the activities undertaken by scientists which formed the foundations for legitimising further practice. In short, a wave of criticism around ‘Enlightenment grand metanarratives about science, truth, universality, human nature and world-views’ was breaking across the academy (Charmaz, 2014 p. 13). Constructivism offered a counterpoint to positivist and post-positivist paradigms and was taken up by Kathy Charmaz in her constructivist grounded theory, which offered an alternative to the previous iterations of Glaser and Strauss.

3.2.6 Constructivism

Constructivism is a form of interpretivism (Pickard, 2017 p. 12) which encompasses a range of interpretations from radical constructivism, to social constructionism to feminist standpoint epistemologies (Schwandt, 1998). Contrary to the long history of research which has sought to find the ‘commonalities within various kinds of social life evading and avoiding representations of the complications, messiness and denseness of actual situations and differences’ (Clarke, 2011 p. xxviii), constructivism offers a perspective which moves away from the search for ‘ontological realism to ontological relativism’ (Guba and Lincoln, 1994 p. 109). Constructivism considers ‘realities as multiple, intangible mental constructions’ which are sometimes conflicting and are ‘socially and experientially based, local and specific in nature’ although they might be shared between individuals (Guba and Lincoln, 1994, p. 110). This ontological position influences and combines with the epistemological position. Contrary to a positivist paradigm, in which a ‘real’ reality is assumed and is coupled with a rational and objective knower who must exist in order to find that ‘real’ reality, a constructivist position suggests that realities are constructed by people, and that these people include the ‘observer’ or researcher (Guba and Lincoln, 1994; Howell, 2015). Knowledge and truth from a constructivist point of view ‘are created, not discovered by mind’ (Schwandt, 1998 p. 236) and by extension ‘research acts are not given; they are constructed’

(Charmaz, 2014 p. 13) and include what ‘researchers and participants bring to it and do within it’ (Charmaz, 2014 p. 13) meaning that research acts are a joint construction (Schwandt, 1998), dependent upon those parties and their interactions with one another (Howell, 2015).

This interaction between parties and the construction of realities is a form of knowing and learning which constructivists consider to be embedded in social life (Charmaz, 2014). Knowledge is constructed ‘through continual interaction and modification of constructions in a social environment’ (Howell, 2015 p. 5) in which action is ‘embedded within local and ever-changing contexts’ (Gergen, 1993 p. xi-xiii) and includes the research environment as well as the studied environment. Meaning is made in particular places, times and by particular actors ‘through complex processes of social interaction involving history, language and action’ (Schwandt, 1998 p. 222).

The constructivist position also recognises subjectivity and allows for values and bias. This relates to the participants but also to the researcher. From a constructivist point of view ‘inquiry methodology requires attending to the inquirer’s own self-reflective awareness of his or her own constructions and to the *social* construction of individual constructions (including that of the inquirer)’ (Schwandt, 1998 p. 242 italics in original). As a result, methodologies need to take into account ‘who is authorised and not authorised to make what kinds of knowledges about whom/what, and under what conditions’ (Clarke, 2011 p. xxv). Constructivism recognises that social construction is a sustained and never completed process which is part of a structure which is both the medium and the result of the practices which form social systems (Giddens, 1981 p. 19).

Constructivism also considers that the inquirer is an interpreter, rather than an authority figure and it acknowledges that both the human and sometimes non-human

elements shape the enquiry (Charmaz and Bryant, 2016a p. 25). Rather than positioning the inquirer as a ‘disinterested scientist’, constructivism instead positions the inquirer as a ‘passionate participant’ (Guba and Lincoln, 1994 p. 112). As such the researcher transforms their perceptions into a representational form. Schwandt (1998) describes this ‘narrative, storied mode’ as significant because ‘it points to the importance of an aesthetic (versus scientific or propositional) form of knowing in human inquiry’ (p. 245). In a study which focuses on shared reading where fictional or illustrative aspects are key, it follows that a line of enquiry which focuses on and acknowledges this aesthetic form of knowing is employed.

3.2.7 Constructivist Grounded Theory

As a result, constructivism provided the opening for the development of an alternative conception of grounded theory to come to the fore. Through her work in the 1990s and with the publication of *Constructing Grounded Theory* (2006, 2014) Kathy Charmaz offered up a re-statement of the method which answered many of the ‘epistemological shortcomings’ of earlier versions (Flick, 2019 p. 9). Constructivist grounded theory recognises that the subjects and the researchers ‘*construct* our grounded theories through our past and present involvements and interactions with people, perspectives and research practices’ (Charmaz, 2014 p. 17, orginal italics) and ‘acknowledges that [research] occurs under specific conditions’ (Charmaz, 2014 p. 13) as supposed to researchers eschewing their role within the process and considering that data provides ‘a window onto reality’ (Charmaz, 2000 p. 523). For example, my own background working in children’s publishing and teaching children’s illustrators about publishing as well as my experiences of my own children’s shared digital reading in the pandemic impacts the data construction, in addition to the way the literature on the subject is interpreted.

Whilst retaining the comparative, emergent and open-ended nature of the original 1967 statement, constructivist grounded theory opens out the method by encouraging a focus on not only action but also meaning-making which includes looking for 'beliefs and ideologies as well as situations and structures' (Charmaz, 2000 p. 525). Charmaz's version of grounded theory is used as a set of 'flexible, heuristic strategies'(Charmaz, 2000 p. 510) which further constructivist and relational understandings (Clarke, 2007). However constructivist grounded theory also preserves realism by tightly adhering to empirical inquiry, where instead of seeking a single, lasting and universal truth it addresses 'human realities and assumes the existence of real worlds' whilst understanding that we act within and upon our realities (Schwandt, 1998; Charmaz, 2000 p. 523). Nor is it limited just to the study of humans but can accommodate non-human objects too. Clarke explains: 'just as "nature" and "society" are not separate but "make each other up" – are co-constitutive – so too do humans and nonhuman objects' (2011, p. xxxv).

This constructivist world view also affects how data collection is carried out, making it 'less formal, more immediate, and [where] subjects concerns take precedence over researchers' questions' (Charmaz, 2000 p. 523). It is an approach which 'necessitates a relationship with respondents in which they can cast their stories in their own terms' and listen 'to those stories with openness to feeling and experience' (Charmaz, 2000 p. 525).

Constructivist grounded theory also moves the method from inductive, through Strauss's inductive-deductive approach, to an abductive approach, which is to say that it 'relies on *reasoning – making inferences* – about empirical experience' (Charmaz, 2014 p. 201, her italics). The upshot of this abductive stance is a 'stronger emphasis on creativity and intuition' (Flick, 2019 p. 10) in examining the data. This abductive streak means that the researcher attempts to 'evoke experiential feeling' through their writing (Charmaz, 2000 p.

527) taking on a role as ‘a storyteller whose tales have believable characters, not as an omniscient social scientist’ (Charmaz, 2000 p. 528).

3.2.8 Relevance to the current study

This constructivist vision of grounded theory is pertinent in a study which seeks to privilege the perspectives of children whilst maintaining an understanding of the conditions, structures and the relational nature of the reading practices in question. It draws attention to the need for a research design which considers these factors, through which these realities will be constructed and whereby the instruments of the research design can attend to the social nature of those constructions and the power relations inherent within them.

To uncover the co-constructed shared digital reading practices which children and their families used during a period of social distancing requires an openness to understanding the individual experiences and circumstances which constructivist grounded theory fosters. Hicks, (2018a) points out the complementary natures of constructivist grounded theory and visual methods which she suggests is underexplored in examining information literacy (p. 198). For young children, employing constructivist grounded theory coupled with participatory video data will allow ‘an exploration of the affordances and power structures that shape everyday life’ whilst also allowing for the close examination of literacy as embodied and materially mediated (Hicks, 2018a p. 195).

In particular the nature of the research instruments including the ethical procedure of information giving is key. A positivist or post-positivist attitude towards the ethics procedures, whilst seeing them as important, also considers them extrinsic to the inquiry process itself (Guba and Lincoln p. 112). However, a constructivist point of view considers the ethical information giving process to be intrinsic to the research (Guba and Lincoln p. 112). In this research, which took place in a socially distanced climate, the information giving

and ethical procedures formed the beginning of the constructivist relationship between researcher and subject, and played a key role. The importance of this relationship is emphasised in constructivist grounded theory as well as the body of scholarship on working ethically with children (Alderson and Morrow, 2012; James and Prout, 2015). Via a constructivist worldview research instruments are not considered to be valid instruments which produce verifiable results, as Guba and Lincoln (1994) explain: '(the Heisenberg uncertainty principle and the Bohr complementarity principle having shattered this illusion)' (p. 107), rather their material or non-human place in the construction of realities needs to be carefully considered in the research design. Thus, the research instruments which are used within the research design will be carefully considered in this light and are fully described within the research design chapter which follows this one.

The commitment to a creative, intuitive and inductive streak which runs through constructivist grounded theory is also crucial to research design. It is not only important in the reporting of the data at writing up stage, but also for its potential use in communicating the research to the participants from the very start. As (Gorman and Clayton (2005) put it, 'the manner in which participants are informed about the research will influence what can be done' (p. 93) and from a constructivist world view research design plays a vital role in how the data are constructed. Communicating not just the whys and wherefores of the research, but the nature of the research will allow the participants to fully engage and understand the nuances of the research which they are constructing which may lead to a richer data collection. This study focused on this area with particular reference to how it could make the nature of the research intelligible to young children, which is again detailed in the research design chapter which follows this.

Constructivist grounded theory foregrounds multiple social realities and knowledges of empirical worlds, which answers the call for a method which allows children to give their

points of view. It answers the epistemological bind which Glaser and Strauss found themselves in by shedding the positivist and post-positivist veneers. Constructivist grounded theory suggests that strategies do not need to be rigid or prescriptive; rather it suggests that focusing on meaning can further understanding, instead of limiting it (Charmaz, 2000). It acknowledges the mutual creation of knowledge by the viewer and the viewed and looks for an interpretive understanding of subjects' meanings (Guba and Lincoln, 1994; Schwandt, 1998; Charmaz, 2000, 2014). It has been used in Information Literacy Practice research (Lloyd, 2005, 2009; Hicks, 2018; Lloyd and Wilkinson, 2019) including research with very young children (Mckechnie, 2006). It forms a neat fit with this study with the emphasis on courting different perspectives, investigating contingent, co-constructed experiences and fostering understanding of the situated practice rather than measuring up etically prescribed attainment goals.

This chapter will now explore the two sensitising theories which accompany a constructivist point of view. Sensitising concepts, which Charmaz advises can be used in constructivist grounded theory even if from 'other perspectives' (Charmaz, 2000 p. 513), are defined as '*points of departure* to form interview questions, to look at data, to listen to interviewees, and to think analytically' (Charmaz, 2014 p. 31, italics in original). Here too these sensitising concepts, along with a sociocultural understanding of information literacy, paratexts and constructivism hold a strong influence on the research design of this PhD study. This chapter now moves to explore a sociomaterial perspective with an emphasis on Agential Realism and Practice Theory with an emphasis on sociomaterial aspects.

3.3 Sociomateriality

As the literature review has established, information literacy practices relating to shared digital reading which this study explores, which are relational and take place across varied

platforms, devices and formats, require a theoretical framework which takes into account their 'ephemerality, multiplicity, dispersion and mobility' (Orlikowski, 2007 p. 1445). The literature review also highlighted the need to take into account the characteristics of the child and their family including social contexts as well as the physical and material factors of reading resources (Kucirkova and Grøver, 2022).

Sociomateriality, a group of theoretical positions which includes, but is not limited to, Actor Network Theory (ANT) (Latour, 2007), new materialisms (Coole and Frost, 2010) and Barad's agential realism (Barad, 2007) offers a solution. Sociomaterial positions converge in a commitment to explore how sociocultural aspects of life are knitted together with materiality and an 'insistence on speaking of the social and the material in the same register' (Orlikowski, 2007 p. 1437). Some, including the work of Karen Barad, require replacing the idea of materiality as 'pre-formed substances' with that of 'performed relations' (Orlikowski, 2007 p. 1438). Barad's work on sociomateriality provides a perspective on technology as social practice and their[2] theory of agential realism is a mechanism which can 'reconfigure our taken-for-granted notions [and] assumptions' (Orlikowski, 2007 p. 1446) when conducting research. As such, it provides a relevant sensitising concept for this study.

3.4 Agential Realism

Challenging Cartesian epistemology and the humanist ontologies which underpin it, 'agential realism is a form of social constructivism' (Barad, 1996 p. 186) developed from a feminist reading of Bohr's philosophy of quantum physics (Barad, 1996, 2003, 2007). It rejects 'transcendental, universal, unifying master theories in favour of understandings that are embodied and contextual' (Barad, 1996 p. 187). It suggests that everything is always already in relation and that matter and discourse are co-constitutive: 'to privilege the material or the

[2] I have used people's preferred pronouns in this thesis.

discursive is to forget the inseparability that characterises phenomena' (Barad, 1996 p. 181). In this way, phenomena become the primary ontological unit from which differential patterns of mattering emerge and come into being.

Barad explains 'existence is not an individual affair. Individuals do not pre-exist their interactions; rather, individuals emerge through and as part of their entangled intra-relating' (Barad, 2007 p ix). Materials are not just tools or objects for particular ends but instead are 'agentive participants in the unfolding events' (Kumpulainen *et al.*, 2022 p. 42). This is characterised as 'intra-action' as supposed to 'interaction' which 'assumes distinct entities which come together and act upon one another' (Clark and Lupton, 2021 p. 1226). 'Nature' and 'culture' are not distinct but are always in relation (Barad, 1996 p. 181).

This entanglement of entities (humans or technologies) means that the notion of independent things is dispensed with; instead 'these entities necessarily entail each other in practice' (Orlikowski and Scott, 2008 p. 456). The intra-active entanglements are constantly being made and remade through these reciprocal relations between relationally, socially and materially produced phenomena which come to matter in specific ways (Barad, 2007). The relational and co-constitutive nature of these phenomena necessarily entails 'knowing' and 'being' as inseparable, forming an onto-epistemology, which frames this research. Barad argues that this posthumanist performativity, as they term it, provides a better account for the 'ongoing materialisation of the world' (Fairchild and Taylor, 2023 p. 6) which echoes the sociocultural conceptions of information literacy with which this study aligns.

This relational perspective has implications for understandings of agency. An agential realist account of agency is something which is shared between people and objects through their relations. Cutting agency 'loose from its traditional humanist orbit' (Barad, 2003 p. 826) shifts agency from 'an individually bodied attribute or possession to a distributed force

enacted by humans and non-humans' (Fairchild and Taylor, 2023 p. 5). This is essential to consider when researching shared digital reading practices, where dispersed materiality across digital platforms and reading devices is characteristic. Assigning greater attention to the material aspects in the research design and analysis will allow this study to unpack the research questions more fully.

3.4.1 Agential cuts

Performativity and this conception of agency, as something which is made within relations, have ramifications for how research is conducted. It suggests that 'there is no separation between "objects" and "agencies of observation"' (Fairchild and Taylor, 2023 p. 3). This stems from Barad's discussion of quantum theories. This includes Bohr's measurement interaction, in which the apparatus used to measure the object disturbs that object in the measurement process. Barad suggests that as a result, measurement apparatus should be accounted for.

They characterise this as the 'agential cuts' (Barad, 2003, p. 815) which are made when research is conducted. Examples of the agential cut are the categorisation of children and adults which privilege the point of the view of the adult, or adult imposed measures of literacy which reference certain forms of attainment. Material objects, the apparatus, which are used in research also produce material-discursive practices which shape meaning and certain forms of knowledge through agential cuts and which, as a result, make the world known in certain ways (Barad, 2003, p. 815). Examples might include text-only information sheets which exclude children on the basis of their nascent abilities in deciphering text. Agential cuts mean that certain realities appear and others do not, they are an enactment of boundaries which involve exclusions, as well as what is included (Barad, 2003 p. 826). In this

way, ethics becomes central to an agential realist account because creating different agential cuts within research designs offers the possibility of alternative forms of knowledge creation.

3.4.2 Diffraction

In response, Barad suggests a non-dualistic diffractive methodology as the overarching proposition of agential realism. Diffraction was inspired by a diffraction grating experiment. This demonstrated that the different apparatus used to perform an experiment on subatomic particles could either lead to the particles exhibiting wave-like behaviour or particle-like behaviour. This entanglement of the objects and agencies of observation, without acknowledgement of how the research is constructed, Barad suggested, would simply produce reworkings of 'sameness'. Diffractive approaches, on the other hand, involve exploring differences, including questioning what is excluded and how those exclusions matter (Penn, 2019 p. 176). Barad suggests that the alternative is to employ methodological and analytical research perspectives, which illuminate 'the patterns of difference, not sameness' (Fairchild and Taylor, 2023 p. 8). These differences come to matter, not only in the observed world but also in our research practices (Davies, 2014 p. 734).

In short Barad refutes the idea that knowledge and knowledge-making 'come from standing at a distance and representing but rather from *a direct material engagement in the world*' (Barad, 2007 p. 49, their italics). Research, therefore, is embedded in material relations through which entities respond to each other. Therefore, the research design and processes are not separate practices from what is observed but are rather implicated in the knowledge formation. Researchers are entangled within the process. This has ontological, epistemological and ethical implications: researchers must reflect on which materialities are privileged in the agential cuts performed in the study (Barad, 2007). These central tenants of

agential realism have far-reaching implications for research with children which are explored and unpacked in the following section.

3.4.4 Researching children

Until very recently children were researched as 'objects in developmental or sociological phases of growth' and were of interest in the most part in relation to their advance into adulthood (Penn, 2019 p. 175), in the same vein in which information literacy work was demarcated by developmental stages, as described in the literature review. From the 1980s onwards the prevailing position on researching children changed to a stance which regarded children as social actors with agency, who should be allowed to voice their opinions freely (United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), 1989; Qvortrup, 1991; James and Prout, 2015). This approach contested the idea that childhood was a natural and given state and instead suggested that it was socially, historically and geographically situated (James and Prout, 2015). It also argued that the voices of children were largely absent from research. In short research 'on' children became research 'with' children.

However, an agential realist position challenges one of the central points of this conception: the humanist point of view. Rejecting human-centeredness also involves rejecting child-centeredness (Moss, 2016 p. xi). Just as the sociocultural stance on information literacy rejects the idea that knowledge and learning are things which are 'out there' to be taken on by a person, instead arguing that they are enacted, agential realism takes the position that agency too is an enactment: it 'is not something which one has' (Barad, 1996 p. 183). This view complements practice theory, which this chapter will go on to explore. Practice theory views agency 'as a feature and effect of practices' (Bollig and Kelle, 2016 p. 34). If agency is enacted in relations between things, then it is not possible to presuppose an agentic child (nor agentic material objects) (Kumpulainen *et al.*, 2022 p. 186). Rather agency is considered to

emerge as a result of the conditions of the practice. The entanglement of all human and non-human phenomena intra-acting with one another means parents, children, devices, books are not in a 'relationship of externality to each other' (Barad, 2007 p. 152). The child as the unit of analysis or any other form of child-centred research does not offer a compatible solution to the entangled nature of these reading practices, which instead takes the practice as the unit of analysis which accounts for relationality.

However, the preceding literature review detailed the need for alternative points of view to that of the adult, specifically children's views, whilst also recognising the social, or as Barad would have it, the entangled, nature of the forms of reading including the material entities under enquiry. Barad's work takes this into account. They argue that agential realism uncovered certain privileged ways of knowing by troubling the role of the researcher and their instruments, offering diffraction as a means to uncover other ways of knowing. Through both agential realism and the work on the sociology of children, children's perspectives have been identified as consigned to a lesser position 'outside the charmed circle of a fully developed adult person, the apogee of existence' (Moss, 2016 p. xi). Here diffraction offers a solution in its disruption of taken for granted knowledge. Barad offers an invitation to researchers to 'meet the universe halfway in its becoming' (Penn, 2019 p. 176), which allows the researcher to take an active position within the inquiry. This conception suggests researchers 'embrace the responsibility that our affect as observers, measurers and interpreters has in co-constructing the world' (Penn, 2019 p. 176) and which acknowledges that through the intra-actions between children and research, children's accounts become entwined with our accounts (Penn, 2019 p. 185). This calls for a relational research design and analysis which decentres, but does not exclude, the adult and foregrounds the experiences of children. This redresses the power dynamic which has privileged adults and will allow a greater outlet for the perspectives of children.

3.4.5 Agential Realism in relation to this study

Agential realism, as a form of constructivism (Barad, 1996, p. 186), is compatible with constructivist grounded theory because the notion of agencies of observation provides a useful mnemonic to understand not only the influence of the researcher over the data but also the influence of the material objects through which the research is conducted. The use of constructivist grounded theory takes up Barad's invitation to use methodological and analytical perspectives which illuminate difference by focussing on the data from the ground up and acknowledges the entanglement of the researcher in the process of knowledge formation.

Sociomaterial perspectives including Barad's work have been most commonly used in research with children in the field of Education. Sociomaterial theories are used by Land *et al.* (2020) to create pedagogies which take the messy entanglements of the digital worlds of children into account. Relationality is emphasised by Burnett and Merchant (2018) when considering reading for pleasure in education. A sociomaterial approach is taken by both Kervin, Comber and Woods (2017) and Gillen and Kucirkova (2018) in exploring the classroom. Sociomaterial perspectives have also been used when researching young children in a home setting: Lundtofte, Odgaard and Skovbjerg, (2019) and Marsh (2017) explore the complexity of children's play with iPads and report that this theoretical position enhanced understanding of connections across digital and nondigital times and spaces. Barad's work is used by Davies (2014) and Penn (2019) to reflexively explore how their research with young children was constructed and to question their role as researchers in how they analysed and presented their findings. Sociomaterial perspectives have also been found useful away from children's perspectives, with a focus on the attitudes of adults to reading (Kucirkova and Flewitt, 2020). This corpus of work suggests that a sociomaterial perspective is a fruitful avenue when exploring children, their families and digital reading. Whilst there is work

which draws on sociomaterial perspectives in Information Studies and in the area of information literacy practices (Pilerot, 2014; Hicks, 2018), at the time of writing, there was no work on information literacy practices from a sociomaterial perspective with a focus on young children, a gap which this doctoral thesis seeks to fill.

This chapter now moves to an explanation of practice theory which is also used as a sensitising concept, framing this research. Practice theory is compatible with agential realism in that they share certain traits. They are both theories which reject dualisms. They are situated and understand that entities necessarily entail each other in practice: 'relations and boundaries between humans and technologies are not pre-given or fixed, but enacted in practice' (Orlikowski and Scott, 2008 p. 462). Within this understanding they both acknowledge that embodied knowing-in-action is key to knowledge creation. Both deal with power and reject the notion that power only resides in the social, but suggest that it also resides in the material. Lastly, practice theory explores the relations between presuppositions, norms and skills implicit in social practice (Rouse, 2006 p. 525) thus questioning the reasons for their positions. This troubling of presuppositions and norms complements Barad's work investigating how research design and research instruments impact upon findings.

3.5 Practice Theory

Understanding the complex, dynamic and distributed forms of digitally mediated shared reading which emerged during the pandemic period of social distancing requires a theoretical approach which allows the theorisation of these 'novel, indeterminate and emergent phenomena' (Feldman and Orlikowski, 2011 p. 1240). This doctoral study employs practice theory to do this, which presents a conceptual alternative to other forms of cultural theory (Reckwitz, 2002 p. 243). Similar to other cultural theories, practice theory draws attention to the importance of shared structures of knowledge to illuminate action and social order.

However, practice theory significantly differs in that it situates the social within 'practices' rather than in mental qualities, discourse or interaction (Reckwitz, 2002 p. 249). Instead the unit of analysis becomes the practices rather than the practitioners (Nicolini, 2012). In this instance the reading activities become the site of analysis, rather than the person who is reading or indeed being read to. Reckwitz (2002) usefully offers this explanation of how practices are distinguished in cultural theory and differently in practice theory:

> 'Practice' (Praxis) in the singular represents merely an emphatic term to describe the whole of human action (in contrast to 'theory' and mere thinking). 'Practices' in the sense of the theory of social practices, however, is something else. A 'practice' (Praktik) is a routinized type of behaviour which consists of several elements, interconnected to one other: forms of bodily activities, forms of mental activities, 'things' and their use, a background knowledge in the form of understanding, know-how, states of emotion and motivational knowledge. (p. 249)

In this way the material and corporeal reality where activity occurs constitutes social life (Nicolini, 2012). Stemming from the work of Wittgenstein and Heidegger, which oppose the duality of the Cartesian world view which separates the thinking and perceiving subject, practice theorists draw on the idea that people are always taking part in and performing social practices. They consider the banal and unremarkable elements of everyday life (Bourdieu, 1977; De Certeau, 1984) in which people employ improvisatory skills to accomplish their everyday activities. Ortner (1984) puts it like this:

> The modern versions of practice theory appear unique in accepting all three sides of the...triangle: that society is a system, that the system is powerfully constraining, and yet that the system can be made and unmade through human action and interaction. (p. 159)

Practice theory is not a unifying Grand Theory (Schatzki, 2001; Reckwitz, 2002; Orlikowski and Scott, 2008; Feldman and Orlikowski, 2011). Instead it is used here as a way of framing and orienting research (Schatzki, 2001 p. 13). It is 'an analytical concept that enables interpretation of how people achieve active being-in-the-world' (Gherardi, 2009 p. 357) and to understand how 'boundaries and relations are enacted in recurrent activities' (Orlikowski and Scott, 2008 p. 462). For example, this doctoral study makes use of a related framework: Wenger's (1998) theorizing on communities of practice (see 3.5.4 this chapter) which is encompassed by practice theory. Nicolini (2012) suggests that the plurality and differences within practice approaches are a strength, which contains echoes of Barad's concept of diffraction.

One difference is the way researchers engage with practice theory. Feldman and Orlikowski (2011) suggest that researchers can take an empirical approach to practice, which reflects the importance of practices in everyday activity; a theoretical approach which explores how the dynamics of everyday activity are generated and how they operate in different contexts and over time; and a philosophical approach which focuses on the constitutive role of practices in producing reality (p. 1240-1). For this thesis practice is taken in the empirical and theoretical senses, looking explicitly at the 'what' which explores the everyday activity in its routine and improvised forms and 'how' of practices which looks at the explanation for the activity.

3.5.1 Practice

Within practice theory, practice has been characterised with some variations. Reckwitz (2002) considers practice to be a 'routinized type of behaviour' (p. 249); Gherardi (2009) characterises practice similarly, as 'recurrent patterns of socially sustained action' (p. 356). Orlikowski, (2002) pushes further into the material nature of practices, describing them as

‘recurrent, materially bounded and situated action engaged in by members of the community’ (p. 256). Schatzki (2002) positions them slightly differently putting the emphasis on practices continual unfolding over time and emphasising that they are both structured and dynamic rather than simply being predictable patterns. Schatzki, (1997a) describes practice as ‘a temporally unfolding and spatially dispersed nexus of doings and sayings’ (p. 89) which he described as linked through understandings of what to say and do; through explicit rules and through ‘teleoaffective structures embracing ends, projects, tasks, purposes, beliefs, emotions and moods’ (p. 89). Kemmis supports this view by emphasising that practices are enabled or constrained by the context and are influenced by time, through which layers of meaning are created (Kemmis, 2006 p. 17).

Practice theorists do align on certain points: that practices are suites of activity; that knowledge is relational, constructed and brought about by what is found in the setting including tools and discourses; that practices are built up over time; that meaning is negotiated within people in a particular setting which produce and reproduce identity and ways of interacting and lastly that practice is embodied and therefore more than just an internalised process (Lloyd, 2010b p. 251). This means that aligning with practices involves decentring (although not discounting) the mind, texts and conversation and foregrounding ‘bodily movements, things, practical knowledge and routine’ (Reckwitz, 2002 p. 259). This supports Barad’s assertion that language has held too great a place in scholarship and that considering material-discursive practices is a more salient way of approaching the world.

Using a practice approach in a study of the shared digital reading of young children and their families means that the complexity of contexts can be accounted for without reverting to dualities like digital vs physical books. It can also account for ways of reading which are ‘rich with contingency, multiplicity and emergence’ (Feldman and Orlikowski, 2011 p. 1249). Its relational approach and emphasis on understanding power relations suits these reading

contexts in which multiple people and devices are involved. The decentralisation of language and discursive practices is useful when researching young children who may rely on other forms of communication. Decentring text is also key in this study because the books that children aged four- to eight-years-old might use are highly illustrated and text and illustrations combined work together to create meaning. Similarly, the emphasis on the body allows for non-verbal meaning to be accounted for. If information literacy can be viewed 'as a practice which is socially enacted and made visible through the contextualised sayings and doings of the social setting' (Lloyd, 2021, p. 26) rather than being viewed as either something within a person or within a thing (Limberg, Sundin and Talja, 2012 p. 110), it is important to be able to research bodily intra-actions. Altogether taking a practice approach allows an understanding of shared digital reading as a: 'vast array or assemblage of performances made durable by being inscribed in skills, human bodies and minds, objects and texts' (Nicolini, 2012 p. 2). This chapter now explores key concepts recognised in most practice theories: activity; the body; material objects; agency; knowledge and power (Nicolini, 2012).

3.5.2 Activity

Placing the emphasis on relationality, (Gherardi, 2009) stresses that theories of practice do not consider activity as the intentional acts of individuals (aligning with Barad's conception of agency) instead they 'locate the source of significant patterns in how conduct is enacted, performed and produced' (p. 115). In this way 'practice is a system of activities in which knowing is not separate from doing' (Gherardi, 2000 p. 215). Schatzki (2001), who conceives of practice as 'embodied, materially mediated arrays of human activity' (p. 11), also emphasises the spatial and temporal aspects, describing practices as an organised, open-ended spatial-temporal manifold of actions (Schatzki, 2007 p. 98). Practices are what constitute the site of the social for Schatzki (2002 p. 11) and within that 'action belongs to a practice if it

expresses one of the understandings, rules or teleoaffective elements that organise that practice' (Schatzki, 2012, p. 15).

Rules are defined as 'explicitly formulated directive[s], remonstration[s], instruction[s] or edict[s]' (Schatzki, 2012 p. 16). 'Practical understandings' means to know how to carry out desired actions by basic doings and sayings (Schatzki, 2012 p. 16). 'General understandings' are abstract senses of 'worth, value, nature or place of things' (Schatzki, 2012 p. 16). Lastly, according to Schatzki, accounts of practice must encompass the teleoaffective (how things are done and why). Teleoaffective structures are those which are deemed acceptable within a practice, in terms of both actions and projects for the sake of particular ends and also take in the emotions and moods which people within a practice can acceptably express (Schatzki, 2012 p. 16). These are essential sensitising concepts for this study in which people and material objects within group activities found themselves in temporal and spatial contexts relating to social distancing and domestic settings.

3.5.3 The body

In practice theory the body is not viewed as a 'mere "instrument" which "the agent" must "use" in order to "act"' rather 'if practices are the site of the social, then routinized bodily performances are the site of the social and – so to speak- of "social order"' (Reckwitz, 2002 p. 251, original quotation marks). Firstly, rejecting the Cartesian mind body duality, practice theory recognises that bodies acquire knowledge through bodily, aesthetic and sensory means Gherardi, 2009, p. 354). The body highlights ways of knowing that include wanting, feeling and understanding, that is to say practical thinking or 'know how' (Lloyd and Somerville, 2006 p.192), 'this knowledge is more complex than "knowing that"' because 'it embraces ways of understanding' that are 'largely implicit and largely historically-culturally specific' (Reckwitz, 2002 p. 253 - 4). In this way the body is the 'site of embodied and experiential

knowledge which is referenced against a backdrop of sociocultural, material, economic and historical horizons' (Lloyd, 2014 p. 86). This matters in shared reading experiences where emotional, historical and sociocultural ways of knowing can be expressed through the bodily ways in which people do things. When researching young children, it also matters that their reports of their bodily experiences are taken seriously, rather than attending to the adult privileged reliance on language and discourse.

Secondly, Schatzki sees the body as the locus of building relations around practices 'through the performance of bodily actions that the performance of other actors is constituted or effected' (Schatzki, 1997 p. 44). For example, Schatzki (2009) describes how people contingently adjust their behaviour towards one another which he named 'harmonization' (p. 43-44) and that practices are only understood through practical contexts which by their nature constitute bodies as well as activities (Schatzki, 2001 p. 11). Rouse explains:

> At the most basic levels of bodily performance, human agency is realised through participation in practices that are 'ours' before they can be 'mine.' (Rouse, 2006 p. 514).

This is significant when considering reading as a shared activity and exploring how knowledge is produced.

Thirdly, the body produces information. Schatzki suggests that the 'body is an entity that in its doings and sayings and sensations manifests and signifies psychological states of affairs' (Schatzki, 1997 p. 24). This is valuable in relation to the tacit cues and sensitivities which characterise embodied understandings (Wenger, 1998 p. 47) made through the body. This is pertinent in a study on young children's shared reading where tacit cues and bodily information can be a vital part of the experience including the storytelling itself. The ways of knowing through the body, including forms of tacit and nuanced learning that take place through the body, prompts enquiry into how practice theorists consider learning and

knowledge which happens across bodies and across communities. This is explored in the following section.

3.5.4 Learning and knowledge

Practice theorists consider knowledge and learning as taking place in the flow of experience, with or without our awareness of it (Gherardi, 2000; Orlikowski, 2002). It is understood as grounded in everyday situated practice and that this knowing in practice is 'enacted through ongoing action' (Feldman and Orlikowski, 2011 p. 1243). This rejects the dualism that knowledge is an external thing which can be acquired or that knowledge exists within human brains, bodies or communities, rather it is something which is happening within the flow of everyday practice (Feldman and Orlikowski, 2011).

Relating to learning and knowledge is the theory of Communities of Practice (Lave and Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998) which is aligned to the practice theory tradition. Communities of practice refer to joint enterprise, shared repertoire and mutual engagement (Wenger, 1998 p. 73). The concept of communities of practice does not refer to a group of people but rather 'to a social process of negotiating competence in a domain over time' and where learning of some form takes place (Wenger-Trayner in Farnsworth, Kleanthous and Wenger-Trayner, 2016, p. 143) and in which the learning which takes place does not necessarily take an educational form (Lave and Wenger, 1991).

Communities of Practice also provides the sensitising concepts of 'participation' and 'reification' (Wenger, 1998 p. 55 - 57) in relation to meaning-making which is central to the investigation of children's shared reading practices in digitally mediated settings. Wenger (1998) explains a dual process of both participation and reification which engender meaning-making within these communities of practice. Participation 'describes the social experience of living in the world in terms of membership in social communities and active involvement

in social enterprises' as well as constructing identities in relation to these communities (Wenger, 1998 p. 55). It is not just a matter of engagement but rather of being an active participant within the practices and to construct identities in relation to these communities. Reification, which is linked to participation, is defined by Wenger as 'the process of giving form to our experience by producing objects that congeal this experience into 'thingness' (Wenger, 1998 p. 58). When dealing with fictional characters and settings this is a vital concept to hold onto.

These ways of meaning making and identity formation come about in the performance of the practice and can be through tacit and nuanced information, which is coded and specific to the community, who determine what knowledge is valued and sanctioned reflecting the history, assumptions, beliefs, values and rules of this community (Lloyd, 2010c p. 20). Learning in practice also means that people's interactions with material objects are examined. Practice theorists' stances on the place of material objects within practice is explored below.

3.5.5 Material objects

Material objects in practice approaches are considered to be 'relational and enacted in practice' (Feldman and Orlikowski, 2011 p. 1249). That is to say that a material object is only significant when it is handled (Reckwitz, 2002 p. 253). How materiality is used in practice theory varies. On one hand Schatzki understands materiality to have 'compositional significance' (Schatzki, 2010 p. 132) but ultimately assigns a greater degree of agency to the human subject. However, scholarly work in the posthumanist field, including the work of Barad, means that there is a vein of work in practice approaches which assign equal significance to the material. Orlikowski (2007) considers that there is 'not social that is not also material and not material that is not social' (p. 1437). Gherardi (2009) concurs, arguing that materiality is a 'form of distributed agency' (p. 352). It is important to stress that this

point of view does not consider material objects to be thinking or animated, rather it aligns with the expression of agency put forward by Barad (2003) 'not as an attribute but the ongoing reconfigurings of the world' (p. 818). This thesis takes this point of view aligning with the sociomaterial perspective outlined earlier in this chapter. In this way 'the relationality between the social world and materiality can be subjected to enquiry' (Gherardi, 2009 p. 115) and an understanding of how these objects contribute in 'organizing, structuring and shaping activities in the explored practice' can be gained (Pilerot, 2014 p. 45).

Extending a greater focus on materiality and drawing attention to the distribution of agency across humans and non-humans also draws attention to the concept of epistemic objects put forward by Knorr-Cetina (1997, 2001). This suggests that certain dynamic material objects are characterized by a lack or incompleteness which prompts activity. This is pertinent when studying reading practices which occur across digital platforms and material objects which might prompt forms of action. Orlikowski and Scott, (2008) in their study of social media, found that these channels were integral, with Orlikowski later describing them as 'actively part of the knowledge produced and the relations enacted' (Feldman and Orlikowski, 2011 p. 1248). This is potentially important for the dispersed types of reading and the material paratexts, including the digital material in the shared reading experiences which are the subject of this study.

Genette's original definition of paratexts emphasises them as 'between' things, places of transition and transaction where meaning is made, a concept which ensures the 'text's presence in the world' (Genette, 1997, p. 1). Bringing the study of paratexts together with a practice theory approach means bringing it into 'the space of interaction between people and artefacts' (Leonardi, 2010 p. 11). Foregrounding the relational nature of the paratext and changing the unit of analysis to the practice rather than to the work which the paratext is

appended to is when ‘we can ask what sort of agency and ‘actor-ship’ is made possible by these specific conditions’ (Nicolini, 2012, p. 7).

A practice-based approach has the capacity to focus on a world which is interconnected ‘and in which boundaries around social entities are increasingly difficult to draw’ (Nicolini, 2012, p. 2) providing an opening in how to identify paratexts, which the literature review has detailed. A practice approach can highlight the relations between structure and processes which serve to illuminate issues around interface, infrastructure and paratexts, in their role as agents in ‘a zone not only of transition but also of *transaction’* (Genette, 1997 p. 2, his italics), and how they are acting upon the reading practice as it unfolds.

3.5.6 Agency and power

The role of agency in practice theory is also a point of difference between theorists. Schatzki (2002) emphasises the role of human agency, although it is still understood within its place in which social life is constituted through the site of the practice (Schatzki, 2005). For Schatzki, sites of practice are shaped by arrangements of material objects which channel the practice (Schatzki, 2012 p. 16). However as described in the previous section on Barad’s work on agential realism (see 3.4) and the previous section (see 3.5.5.) on material objects in practice theory, this thesis considers ‘agency as distributed between humans and non-humans’ (Gherardi, 2009 p. 115) . Reckwitz (2002) explains:

> When particular ‘things’ are necessary elements of certain practices, then, contrary to a classical sociological argument, subject-subject relations cannot claim any priority over subject-object relations, as far as the production and reproduction of social order(liness) is concerned (p. 253).

Taking a sociomaterialist stance, agency is not only considered to be distributed across human and non-human objects but also as an ongoing constitutive relationship; 'they are ongoing accomplishments (re)produced and possibly transformed in every instance of action' (Feldman and Orlikowski, 2011 p. 1242).

Focusing on agency naturally leads to a focus on power. Practices are viewed as 'constellations of power' in which there is an ever present question about 'what can be done and who can do what' (Pilerot, 2014 p. 44). Schatzki (2005) considers power to be an expression of how one person's actions mould the actions of another person (p. 478). From a sociomaterial point of view and for the purposes of this thesis power is viewed as something which stretches across human and non-human objects. Feldman and Orlikowski (2011) emphasise that because these elements are mutually constitutive of practice 'does not imply equal relations' (p. 1242). Linked to this is their argument that power is an enabling and constraining force for everyday action and that power should be taken into consideration in order to understand the relational forces within a practice (Feldman and Orlikowski, 2011). This is necessary in research around shared reading where issues of power between adults and children have already been identified within the existing literature. It is also useful to keep power in mind when considering the material objects which make up integral parts of the shared digital reading activities, including those which are acting as epistemic objects and leave the way open for action.

3.5.7 Practice Theory and Constructivist Grounded Theory

Constructivist grounded theory places an emphasis on the process and action, the importance of which is supported by various practice theorists. This includes Gherardi (2009), who echoes Barad (2007), suggesting that activity is not the act of the individual but how 'conduct is enacted, performed and produced' (Gherardi, 2009 p. 115). Schatzki also describes

practices as ‘a manifold of actions’(Schatzki, 2003 p. 177) and Wenger (1998) whose conception of learning is defined as a ‘social *process*’ (Farnsworth, Kleanthous and Wenger-Trayner, 2016, p. 153, my italics). Constructivist grounded theory and a practice perspective also make natural bedfellows because of their commitment to the exploration of territory, geographic space, maps, relations among entities in a shared terrain and to making ‘an inventory of space’ (Clarke, 2011, p. 41).

3.5.8 Practice Theory and Information Literacy

Several scholars of information literacy have employed a practice approach. Burnett and Lloyd (2019) have used Schatzki’s conception of practice as the site of the social to explore what enables and constrains access to information. Lloyd (2010a; 2010b; 2012), Veinot (2007) and Hicks (2018) have all used it to highlight the role of the corporeal modality of information in learning and knowing. Pilerot (2014) takes a sociomaterial approach and explores how material artefacts coordinate the enactment of information practices. In the field of digital literacy, Merchant (2014) draws on Schatzki and Reckwitz’s conceptions of practice to explore young children’s use of story apps on iPads. His findings highlight the importance of bodies and how touchscreen activities may integrate into existing practices like playing boardgames. A practice approach can reveal perspectives, values and beliefs in relation to tools and how these are used differently across practices (Limberg, Sundin and Talja, 2012, p. 107). A practice perspective helps the analysis of information literacy practices as holistic and draws attention to the modalities of information including those which may not normally be privileged (Lloyd, 2010c), a key factor in this research.

3.6 Chapter conclusion

This chapter has presented the theoretical framework for the study. It began by exploring constructivism, which highlights how research is considered a co-constructed act between the

researcher and the researched, before continuing with an overview of agential realism. Agential realism forms the onto-epistemological structure for the study and acknowledges that the research instruments used in this research will have a bearing on the findings produced. The chapter then provided an overview of practice theory, which is employed in this study to examine how children and their families connect with information and ways of knowing which are valued in a socially distanced context. In turn, this theoretical framework informs the study's methodological approach, which will be presented in the following chapter.

Various other theories will be used in Chapter 6 to extend this theoretical framework in accordance with the study's use of constructivist grounded theory. More explicitly, Communities of Practice (1998) and the social site (Schatzki, 2002) will be used to explain core concepts within the study's emerging theory of *binding together*. In doing this it draws on theories of social capital theory (Putnam, 2000); bibliotherapy (Heath *et al.*, 2005); paratexts (Genette, 1997; Gray, 2010; Birke and Christ, 2013; Van Dijk, 2014; Brookey and Gray, 2017; Barnett, 2020); picturebooks (Iser, 1978; Nodelman, 1989; Nikolajeva and Scott, 2006); epistemic objects (Cetina, 1997); and the body (Merleau-Ponty, 1962; O'Loughlin, 1998; Cheville, 2005) to explore the construction of shared digital reading practices in more detail.

Chapter 4: Research design

4.1 Chapter overview

This chapter 'document[s] the rationale behind [the] research design and data analysis' (Silverman, 2013 p. 354), in order to meet the research objectives and answer the research questions. It presents the research design and methods that were used to explore the information literacy practice of children and their families relating to their shared digital reading during a time of social distancing. The chapter starts by presenting the co-researchers and the ethical protocol which this study followed to give children and their families information about taking part in research and gaining their consent. It then moves to a description of the research methods for data collection: constructing video data and taking part in semi-structured interviews. From here, it describes how constructivist grounded theory was employed as a method for data collection and analysis. The chapter also details the processes and procedures which were undertaken to ensure the security of collecting and storing video data of children. Lastly, the chapter describes the limitations of these methods.

This study uses a qualitative research design to facilitate 'deep insights' (Chaudron, 2015 p. 19) and thus allows the researcher to be open to possibilities, to pursue new avenues and to take differences in the data into account and their heterogeneous meanings (Clarke, 2011 p. 145). This approach enables the research to respond to the following research question:

How did young children aged four- to eight-year-old and their families experience information literacy practices relating to shared digital reading in their homes during social distancing?

and sub-questions:

- In what ways were information landscapes related to shared digital reading constructed?
- What enabled and constrained the ways in which these information literacy practices were enacted?
- How was meaning made from the resources at the disposal of the children and their families?

4.2 Methodological framing

This chapter also focuses on how understandings of the constructivist paradigm and agential realist perspective influenced the research design. These consider that the researcher is always and already part of the phenomenon (Barad, 2003). This stance is also reflected through the structure of this chapter, which places the description of the ethical procedures centrally, rather than as a final section where it is often situated in research write-ups. By placing a central focus on the information giving and ethics procedures, this research design builds on scholarship on researching children to foreground their perspectives (Alderson and Morrow, 2012; James and Prout, 2015) in creative ways (Yamada-Rice, 2017; Arnott *et al.*, 2020) but does so influenced by the theoretical framework employed by this thesis. This considers research findings as constructed and coming about as the result of the intra-actions between the researcher, the research instruments, the co-researchers and the material objects as ‘mutually defining’ (Gergen, 2009 p. 317).

The ethics procedure and information giving are understood to be research instruments which were formative of relationships and therefore, formative of the generation of the research data. As a result, this chapter includes a section about how understandings of the research were built through engagement between co-researchers, the researcher and research instruments. This in turn was pivotal in producing data from young children and their families in home environments to answer the research questions. These serve to investigate the nuanced and individually constructed reading practices collected in June and July 2021 and reflecting on the periods of lockdowns and social distancing during the Covid-19 pandemic of 2020 and 2021.

4.3 Children and families as co-researchers

Children and their parents/carers are considered co-researchers in this PhD study, in which they chose a shared digital reading practice to highlight for the research, created participatory video data, and the children reviewed or discussed this video data with the researcher at interview, similar to methods used by Supski and Maher (2021).

4.3.1 Foregrounding perspectives

As the literature review and the theory and methodology chapter have highlighted, children's perspectives are needed in research on their reading and their digital practices, but are often sidelined in favour of parents'/carers' or other adults' views, a trend which has been recognised in LIS research with children (Barriage, 2016; Xu *et al.*, 2020). This study privileged children's opinions whilst still recognising the importance of parents/carers as active and participating, and took the practice as the unit of analysis in the research design. It did this in an attempt to redress the well-documented power imbalance between children and adults in research settings (Aarsand, 2012 p. 197).

To do this, the research design selected research instruments which encouraged and allowed children's perspectives, whilst taking the views of adults into consideration as well as relations between the children and adults. This meant placing the emphasis on visual and everyday objects. For example, the ethical and information giving elements were communicated through the use of an illustrated picture book in eBook (linked here) and physical book form, as well as using illustrated forms which indicated children's ongoing consent to participate. The research methods also incorporated the visual and everyday through co-researcher-generated video using smartphones. Whilst the research considers that adult perspectives were clearly evident in the co-creation of these videos, the methods go some way to allowing child perspectives to be highlighted. In addition, and to temper the assumed adult control over the visual research methods, this research also uses children's semi-structured interviews to privilege their perspectives.

Using visual methods allows young children who may still be acquiring language skills and who may not be able to or choose not to articulate themselves verbally, to participate (Nikolajeva, 2013 p. 250). Visual methods also facilitated the ability to decentre emphasis on language, referencing Barad's agential realism, and instead focus on the 'tacit and routine' aspects of practices (Pink, Leder Mackley and Moroşanu, 2015 p. 357) and, as highlighted in the literature review, can take into account corporeal modalities of information. The research design also aims to foreground the material elements of practices. '"Seeing" the agency of the non-human elements present in the situation disrupts the taken for granted' (Clarke, 2011 p. 22) and visual methods, complementing the more traditional semi-structured interview method, allow for an alternative perspective.

4.3.2 Participants

This study recruited eighteen families to take part in this study, which included thirty children aged between four- and eight-years-old. Co-researchers included twenty-one parents/carers, eighteen of whom were mothers and three were fathers. An investigation into shared digital reading meant that sometimes other family members or people known to the children agreed to participate. This included grandmothers, teachers and cousins comprising an additional eight consent forms. A total of fifty-nine consent forms were completed for this research. Of the thirty children initially recruited, twenty-five children took part in the research. This included siblings from the same families, some of whom were jointly taking part in practices together and some who focussed on their own chosen practice separately from their sibling, who also submitted their own individual data (see Table 1 for detail). The majority of practices which children and their parents chose to focus on were employed during the year of lockdowns and school closures which preceded data collection in June and July 2021 (the final months of social distancing restrictions in the UK).

Table 1: Summary of child co-researchers and their recorded reading activities.

Child(ren)	Age	Sex	Reading practice(s) recorded in video data	Person of significance	Recorded or live reading
AshV	6	M	Reading physical book to grandma via FaceTime, Grandma using photos of the book on iPhone to follow along. Grandpa sometimes also present.	Grandma	Live
AliN	8	M	Grandma reading physical book via FaceTime, Grandpa sometimes also present.	Grandma	Live
WynnN	6	M	Teacher reading physical book via Google Classroom recording.	Teacher	Recorded
AliS	8	M	Grandma reading physical book via FaceTime on iPad.	Grandma	Live
FlashM, StarE	4, 6	F, F	Grandpa, Grandma, Male Cousins x 2 audio-recorded reading via toniebox.	Grandpa, Grandma (deceased), male cousins x 2, audiobooks	Recorded
SkyS	8	M	Cousin 1 reading physical book via FaceTime.	Cousin	Live
			Cousin 2 reading physical book via FaceTime with digital photos of a physical book on SkyS's iPad screen.	Cousin	Live
SkyN, MoN, RobinN	4, 6, 8	F, F, F	Grandma's made-up story via What'sApp recording.	Grandma	Recorded
FinnN	4	F	Grandpa reading via Yoto player, FinnN using physical book to look at pictures.	Grandpa	Recorded
			Reading to baby cousin via iPhone voice memo, parents of baby using physical book as listening to recording.	Baby Cousin	Recorded
KitN (and sister FinnN above)	6	M	Creating, performing and recording a performance of a book for baby cousin via video function on smartphone. Dad narrating from physical book.	Baby Cousin	Recorded
NovaA, AriA	4, 6	F, M	Grandma reading physical book via FaceTime.	Grandma	Live
KimE	8	F	Reading physical book to Grandma 1 via FaceTime.	Grandma	Live
			Reading physical book to Grandma 2 and Step-Grandpa via FaceTime.	Grandma and Step-Grandpa	Live
RobinN2, FinnN2	8, 5	M, M	Grandma reading physical book via Zoom, children have same copy of the book.	Grandma	Live
			Dad making up sequential stories via Zoom.	Dad	Live
			Great Aunt reading physical book via Zoom.	Great-Aunt	Live
JoS	6	M	Grandma reading physical book via FaceTime.	Grandma	Live
WynnS	5	F	Teacher reading physical book via YouTube channel recording.	Teacher	Recorded
RaeO	8	M	Grandma reading physical or eBook via Zoom, grandpa also present before reading.	Grandma	Live
KitC	7	M	Listening to audio narration on Oxford Owl eBook.	n/a	Recorded
			Teacher reading via Google Classroom recording.	Teacher	Recorded
WynnJJ, FinnJJ	4,7	F, F	Using narrated eBook.	n/a	
			Listening to celebrity reading on YouTube, including animated elements as well as a physical book.	n/a	Recorded
JaxS	8		Listening to audiobook on MP3 player.	n/a	Recorded
RobinS	8		Listening to audiobook on iPad.	n/a	Recorded

4.3.3 Contextual factors in recruiting

Two factors both enabled and limited the recruitment of co-researchers: firstly, the pandemic context in which recruitment took place; and secondly the guidance of the UCL Research Ethics Committee (REC). In the fifteen months prior to recruitment children and their families had experienced three national lockdowns (UK government, 2022), which included school closures as well as limited access to, among other things, books via libraries, bookshops and schools. It had been a uniquely disruptive time for families (Schmeer *et al.*, 2021 p. 1). Recruitment for this research took place in the UK in May and June 2021 when social distancing guidelines, to prevent the spread of Covid-19, were still in place. Restrictions meant that only two households or a total of six people could meet indoors, negative covid tests were required to enter certain places and those who tested positive were required to self-isolate for five days (Gov.uk, 2021). State schools were organised into 'class bubbles' at this time. If someone within that bubble tested positive for Covid-19 everyone within that bubble was required to isolate at home for five days (bbc.co.uk, 2021)[3]. Data collection took place in June and July 2021. Restrictions ended on the 19th July and data collection ended a week later on the 26th July 2021. This meant that there was a level of uncertainty about whether gaining access to people's homes for the purposes of research was viable, if people would join the study and whether such access would be cut off by people needing to self-isolate. The research design and accompanying documents, such as risk assessment forms and ethics committee clearance forms, included contingencies for moving from online to in-person data collection or vice-versa depending on the presence of the virus for individual families. These forms were prepared months before data collection when the

[3] During the Covid-19 pandemic of 2020 and 2021 government advice when schools reopened was to keep primary school children in separate groups known as 'bubbles' to keep children and staff safe and because social distancing was difficult to achieve with young children. If any member of the bubble contracted Covid-19 the bubble was sent home for a number of days to self-isolate depending on government advice at the time.

level of community transmission was very high, schools were closed and there was a strong sense of uncertainty about what the trajectory of the virus would be when data collection did take place.

Coupled with this ongoing uncertainty there was a sense of urgency by the time data collection did take place. By this time, it was well known that restrictions would be lifted imminently which coincided with the beginning of the school holidays. Many of the potential co-researchers reported that after the end of July when restrictions were lifted and the school holidays began, they would leave to visit family, friends and to go on holiday after several years of social isolation and lockdowns. All aspects of the recruitment and data collection process for this research were coloured by the pandemic context as detailed in the sections which follow.

The second aspect which significantly influenced the recruitment process was the stipulation by the UCL Research Ethics Committee (REC) that because of the risk of coercion, no potential participants were to be approached by the researcher directly, either in person or online. All participants needed to ‘opt-in’ to the research.

4.3.4 Recruitment

Two avenues of recruitment were used, one of which had limited success and one of which was highly successful. In the first instance, co-researcher families were invited to express an interest in joining the study by an ‘opt in’ advert in parent communication emails from one school and one nursery in south-east London. Twenty south London schools and nurseries had been contacted by phone and by email to ask if they would send out the advert in their weekly email newsletters (see Appendix 5). Only the two mentioned above agreed to take part. In-person conversations with schools confirmed that the pandemic years of closures,

transitioning to online learning (which was still ongoing, as class bubbles closed across the UK) meant that there was little time for external projects.

Recruitment took place more successfully via parent/carer WhatsApp groups for four state schools and one nursery in South London. It is not possible to report the number of WhatsApp groups that the advert was placed on, as it was passed on by members of one group to others without the researcher's knowledge. These parent/carer WhatsApp groups proved to be fertile ground for recruitment. Parent/carer WhatsApp groups are organised around children's classes and act as forums for a range of purposes including reminders and information about school activities, requests for fundraising or childcare adverts. The advert to join the research asked parents/carers if their families had been reading differently during the pandemic (see Appendix 6). It included a link to an illustrated eBook, available here which gave details of the research project. The advert also included a link to a secure REDCap page (see Appendix 7 for the text on this page) where interested parties could leave their email addresses for more information. Agreement to use WhatsApp to recruit was sought and granted from UCL's Information Governance team. The REDCap link ensured that no personal data was transferred via WhatsApp, in line with UCL's data privacy regulations. The researcher contacted those who had signed up for more information by email and arranged for socially-distanced outdoor meeting with the family (or in a few cases a phone call with a parent) to give more information about research and its aims. The status of the researcher as a mother, who had also spent the lockdowns at home with her own children, undoubtedly aided the recruitment process. A common experience could easily be established between researcher and potential co-researcher parents when the project was first discussed by phone or in person. The researcher's status as an ex-publisher (who had left the industry to become a stay-at-home mother and registered carer) was either not known or not considered important by co-researchers. Rather their focus was on the shared parental experiences as

well as interest and support for the type of academic research being conducted, which took into account their children's views, in addition to recording the uniquely isolated period of time that the families had experienced. Although the researcher's publisher practictioner experience was vital in aspects of the research process, including in creation the information and consent forms, it was not an important factor in interactions with co-researchers. If the parent and child(ren) were interested in taking part, they were sent an information pack including consent forms, the nature of which is described in the Ethics and Information Giving section of this chapter.

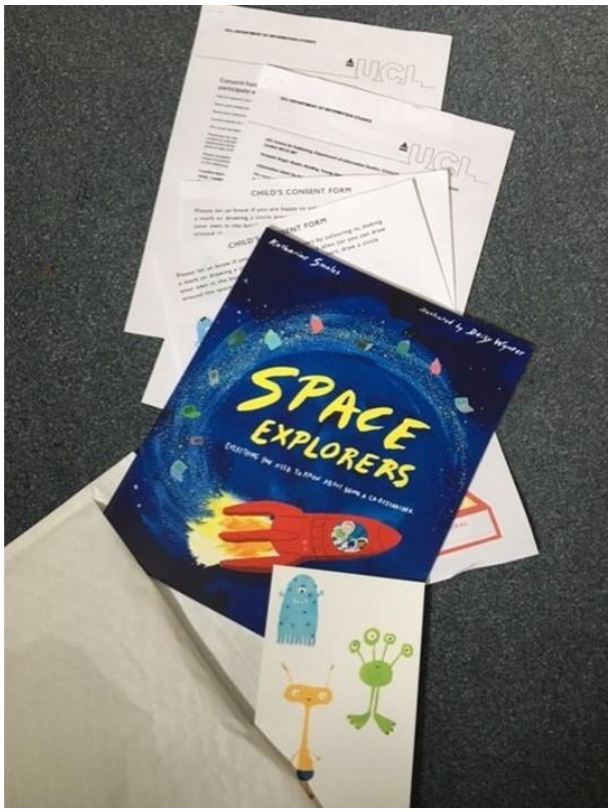
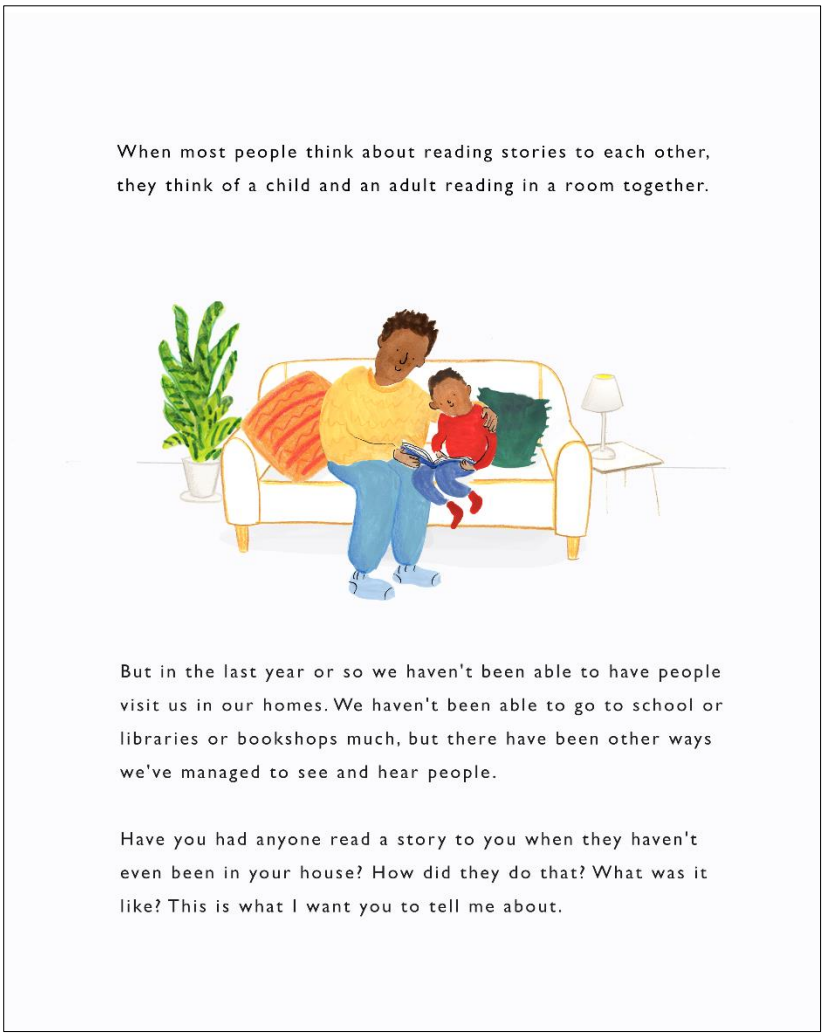


Fig. 2: Recruitment pack sent to interested families

4.3.5 Inclusion criteria

This research aspired to be open to anyone who wished to join. The calls to take part aimed to be as open as possible by asking potential co-researchers how they had been reading during the year of lockdowns and social distancing, rather than stipulating a particular reading

format or activity. A central question which was asked in the recruitment process was ‘have you had anyone read a story to you when they haven’t even been in your house?’ It did this on the basis that the researcher could not know all the ways in which families had been using digital technology in shared reading practices, to avoid silencing co-researchers and (as the literature review emphasised) to avoid placing boundaries on the study by limiting its scope too tightly (Bryman, 2016).


When most people think about reading stories to each other, they think of a child and an adult reading in a room together.

But in the last year or so we haven't been able to have people visit us in our homes. We haven't been able to go to school or libraries or bookshops much, but there have been other ways we've managed to see and hear people.

Have you had anyone read a story to you when they haven't even been in your house? How did they do that? What was it like? This is what I want you to tell me about.

Fig. 3 Page from illustrated book used for recruitment which poses an open question to potential participants

4.3.6 Demographics

The ‘opt-in’ status of the research meant that families who joined tended to be enthusiastic readers, had access to multiple forms of technology, and had had time and resources to put together reading activities during the pandemic. Lastly, in the pandemic context, many had access to outside spaces including gardens or balconies where socially distanced meetings could take place with the researcher. The majority of parents who joined were mothers and, in the case of a same sex couple who took part, the parent who was the primary caregiver. Many of the families had extended families across the UK or in other countries who they were separated from during the pandemic. Many parents were keen to share what they had done during the time of isolation when little external affirmation for their lockdown activities had been available.

The children of the families recruited all attended South London state schools except for one family from West London, who had picked up the WhatsApp advert after it had been forwarded on, and one child who attended a private fee-paying school in South London. There were also five children who attended nursery but who were aged four and therefore met the criteria of the study. Two of the participants were self-isolating in July 2021, due to their bubble being sent home and made their video data during this time, but were out of isolation when the semi-structured interviews took place. Of the twenty-five children who took part in the study, eighteen were White British, four were of mixed British Indian heritage, two were of British Asian heritage and one was mixed British Black Caribbean heritage. Three of the children had been diagnosed with special educational needs conditions: one with Dyslexia, one with Autism Spectrum Condition and one with Developmental Language Disorder and a moderate-severe Speech Sound Disorder. All of the children were from middle class households with at least one working parent and the majority of parents,

but not all, had attended university. These factors will impact on the data collected and are addressed in more detail throughout this chapter and in discussion of the study's limitations.

4.4 Ethical protocol

4.4.1 Information for potential co-researchers

Ethical requirements in the UK and for the UCL REC suggest that information for children and their families who are taking part in research should provide an overview of the research, the methods and purpose, explanations of terminology, the duration of the research and what is expected of participants or co-researchers. It needs to explain concepts like 'anonymity' or 'pseudonymity' and 'confidentiality', explain how data will be used, kept and stored and give researcher and research institution details. Lastly it needs to ask for consent to participate whilst making it clear that potential participants can decline there and then, or at any point in the research (Alderson & Morrow, 2012; British Educational Research Association (BERA), 2018).

In addition, Alderson and Morrow (2012), BERA (2018) and other institutional guidelines ask that attention is given to the specific information needs of individual potential subjects (children and their parents/carers in this case) and that the information should be delivered in a suitable format (World Health Organisation, 2013; National Health Service (NHS) Health Research Authority, 2023; United Kingdom Research and Innovation (UKRI), 2022). Participants should be enabled to give their consent with regard to their needs and capacities (UKRI, 2021). In addition to presenting this information to children, the UCL REC suggest that researchers must take account of the gatekeeper's interests (in this instance parents/carers) and gain their informed consent on behalf of their children (and in the case of this research, for themselves as well). Researchers must strive to ensure that the relationship between the person (the child) and the proxy (the parent/carer) is not disturbed (British

Sociological Association, 2017) and allow for respectful exchanges between all parties, including the researcher (American Anthropological Association, 2012). These criteria support the United Nations Conventions of the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, 1989) which state that children should be allowed to freely state their views (UNCRC, Article 12) whilst also allowing parents and children to exercise their rights and parents' duties of care towards their children (UNCRC, Article 14 and 5). Making efforts to uphold these recommendations and values was key for this research design, which sought to access children's perspectives as well as those of their families and which drew on a constructivist point of view whereby researcher and the researched co-construct their data and tying into the researcher's conception of those who joined as co-researchers rather than participants. Creating and giving information in an accessible form which communicated this research perspective was a cornerstone of the research methods chosen.

Fulfilling this range of criteria for multiple parties can lead to tensions around how to prioritise the agency and competency of children and work within these parameters (Zulfiqar, 2004; Wiles *et al.*, 2007), a struggle to keep a human connection with participants (Anderson *et al.*, 2017) and at worst, information sheets run the risk of prompting rather than alleviating concerns on the part of the prospective participants (Bryman, 2012).

In response to the above criteria, and following (Yamada-Rice, 2017) who argues that simplified information and consent forms are not sufficient to gain a child's consent or adequately inform them about the research, this study sought to create an accessible and familiar form of information. It did this by creating a picturebook which would provoke dialogue, give sound information in an accessible format and act as a starting point to seek provisional consent from children aged four- to- eight years old and informed consent from their parents/carers to take part in research.

Drawing on the researcher's thirteen years working in the UK children's publishing industry, the researcher wrote the text, commissioned an illustrator (who was funded by the Information Studies Department, UCL and the researchers LAHP studentship) and created a picturebook, made available as both an eBook and a physical book, available here.

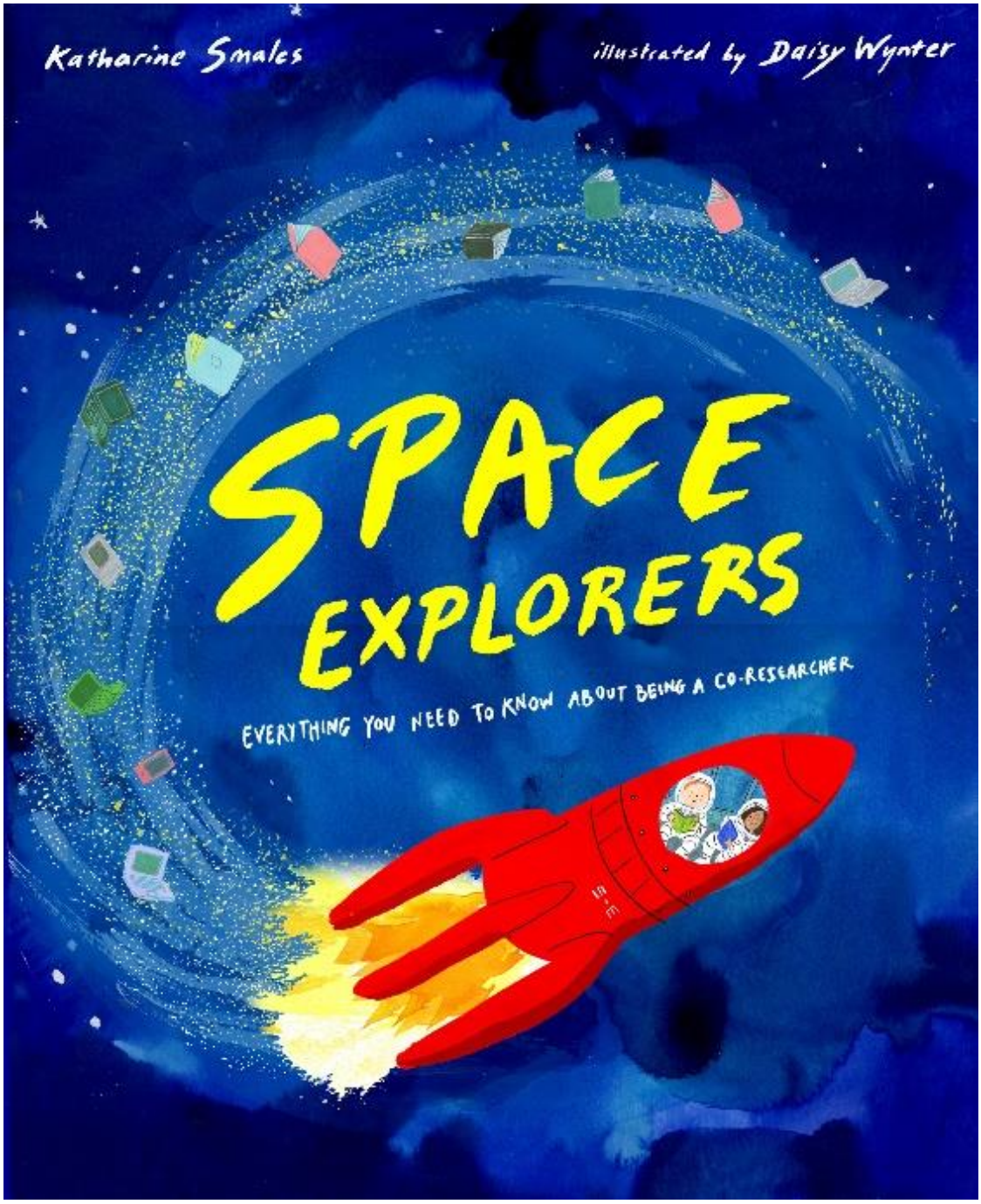


Fig. 4 Cover of the Space Explorers picturebook

The book featured the researcher as a character along with three fictional aliens who ask questions of the researcher and child characters in the book. It gave an overview of the topic, explained the purpose of the research and any terminology. It explained what methods would be used and explained how co-researchers' data would be used, kept and stored. It makes clear to co-researchers, including children, that they were free not to participate at the information giving stage or at any other point in the research. The activities within the book and the illustrations supported this information. For example, there are illustrations of contented children who are declining to participate (see Fig. 5), or of the researcher sitting on a chained safe to illustrate data protection provisions (see Fig. 7). The written text of the book differed very little from template information sheets but included questions directed at potential co-researchers such as 'would that be OK?' The illustrations however included humorous details, fantastical situations and fictional characters -- and an activity for children to choose their pseudonyms (see Fig 6).

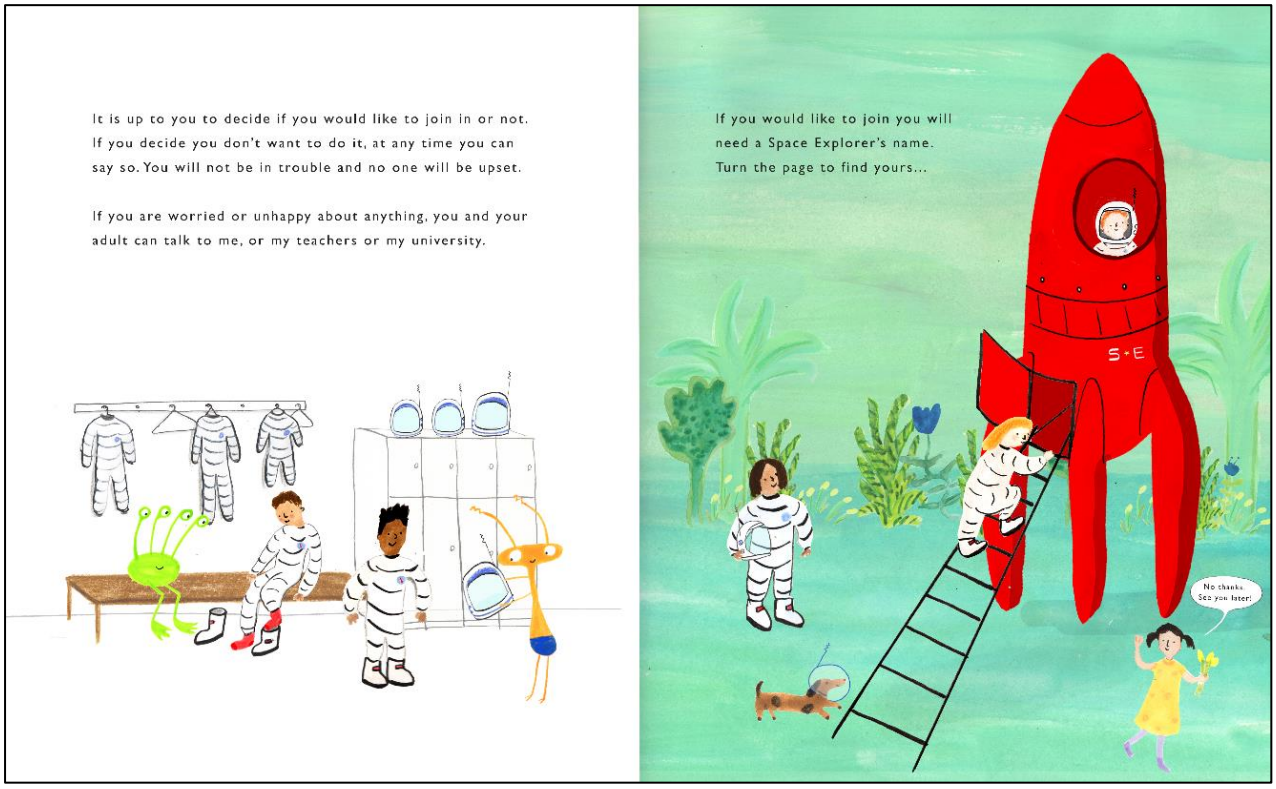


Fig. 5 Non-participating child walking away. Introducing idea of pseudonyms.

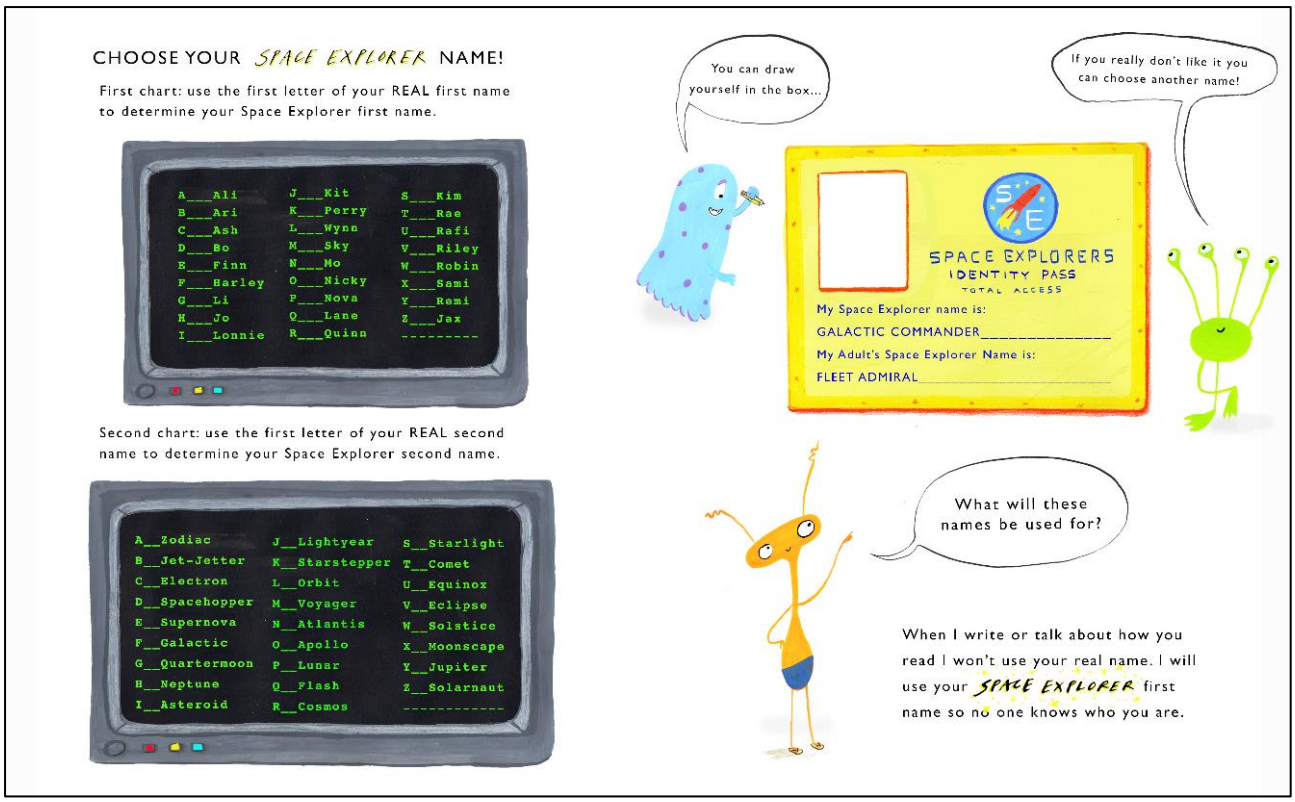


Fig. 6: Choosing pseudonyms and an explanation of what they will be used for.

Fig. 7: Explaining what will happen to the children's data, following on to….

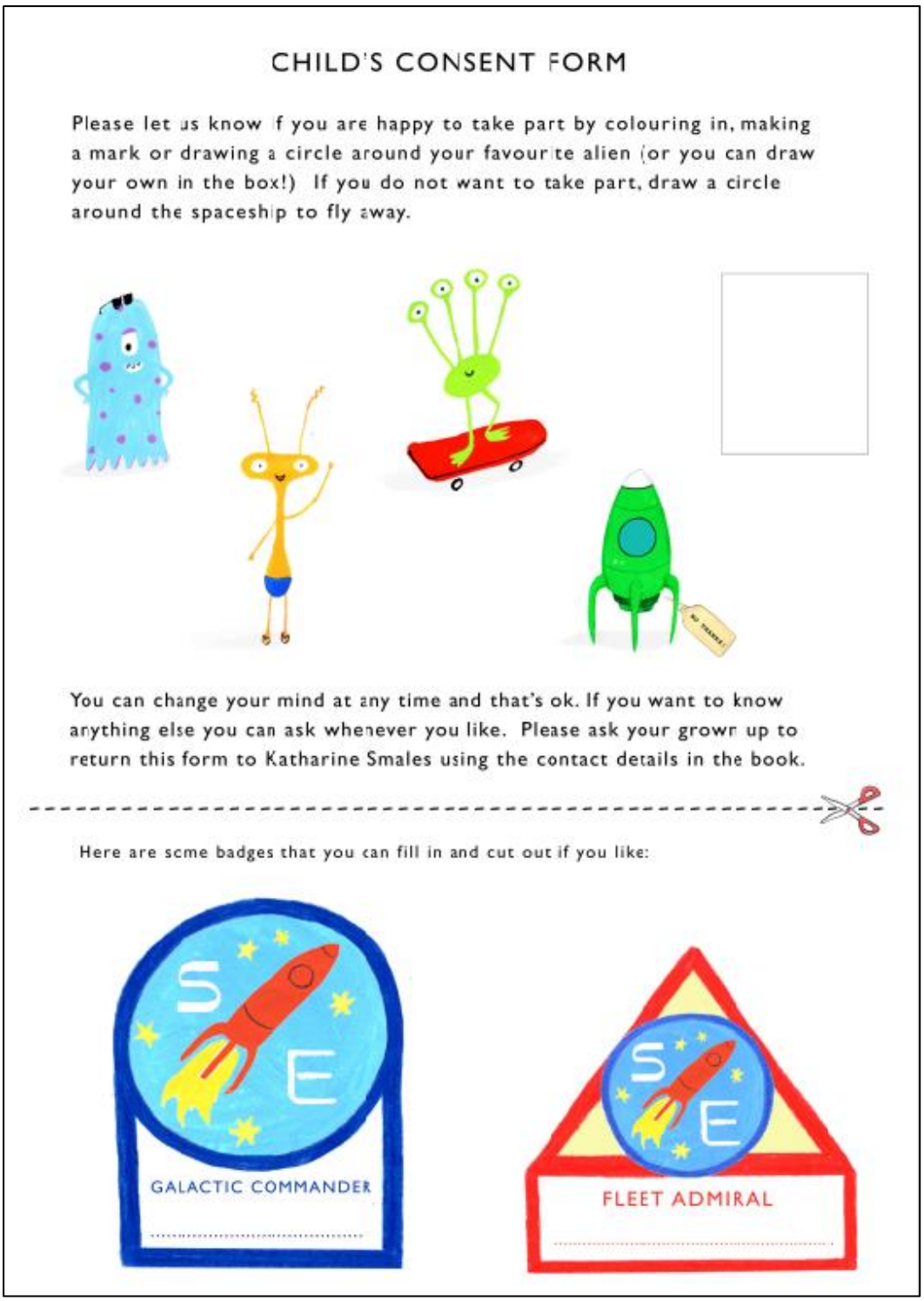
Fig 8: … a dramatic turn of the page to explain the concept of children's rights.

This book formed part of the pack of information which was sent to families who were interested in joining the research. The pack also contained a parents/carers information sheet and consent form for themselves as co-researchers (see Appendices 1 and 2). As part of the information giving process parents/carers were asked to read the book with their children. Parents/carers were encouraged by the researcher to discuss the contents of the book with their children after reading it together, to read it more than once and to allow children to look at it alone if they wished. Parents/carers and children were then given the opportunity to discuss the contents of the book and the research in general with the researcher before committing to joining the study.

4.4.2. Consent

The book was used to gain the initial and provisional consent of the children to take part (Flewitt, 2005 p. 4). Each child was provided with a provisional consent form (see Fig. 9) on

which they could draw an alien signifying their provisional consent to continue with the research process after they had read the picturebook with their parent/carer. The varying levels of reading ability among children of this age means that making a mark or a circle around an alien was an age-appropriate request. If they did not want to participate, they could mark, colour or circle an illustrated spaceship which was flying away. It is important to note that this research did not consider children's provisional consent to participate, as signalled on this form, as a final and fixed agreement nor did it consider the picturebook as the only source of information but rather a springboard in an ongoing relationship between the researcher, children and their parents/carers (Arnott *et al.*, 2020 p. 805). It recognised that the child's agreement to participate is provisional upon the research unfolding in line with their expectations and that this is negotiated throughout the process (Flewitt, 2005 p. 4).



CHILD'S CONSENT FORM

Please let us know if you are happy to take part by colouring in, making a mark or drawing a circle around your favourite alien (or you can draw your own in the box!) If you do not want to take part, draw a circle around the spaceship to fly away.

You can change your mind at any time and that's ok. If you want to know anything else you can ask whenever you like. Please ask your grown up to return this form to Katharine Smales using the contact details in the book.

Here are some badges that you can fill in and cut out if you like:

Fig. 9: Image of the children's provisional consent to continue form

Fig. 10: Children signified their provisional consent to continue by circling or drawing an alien.

During the data collection process the researcher was mindful of children's non-verbal cues and explicitly emphasised to parents to stop any filming if any marker of discomfort was perceived, from the obvious, for example putting a hand up in front of the camera, to more subtle body language and facial signals such as turning away from the camera (Cocks, 2006; Dockett and Perry, 2011). The dynamics of this adult-child relationship is explored more fully in Smales, Lloyd and Rayner (2023).

When the researcher conducted semi-structured interviews with children, the book was reviewed and its contents discussed, including the child's right to stop at any time, which is heavily emphasized in the book itself, including suggestions of non-verbal cues children could use to show they wanted to stop. Markers of discomfort were also attended to during interview. The research design meant that children could walk away from filming or from the interview if they did not want to continue. When five children decided to withdraw from the research, the researcher reminded them of their right to do so as described in the book: a way

of validating their decision. Parents and carers also had a full information sheet and consent form (see Appendices 1 and 2) for themselves and on behalf of their child(ren) in line with guidance that parents should give consent for their children to participate in research (Alderson & Morrow, 2012).

4.4.3 Third party consent

This qualitative study, which asked a deliberately open question designed to surface ways that people are taking part in underexplored shared digital reading practices, meant that additional participants had to be accounted for as data collection was taking place. Other people were filmed during the digital reading practices by parent or child co-researchers. Parents were briefed ahead of time on this scenario. They were asked to let anyone who was going to be reading to the child to know that they were being filmed and to explain why and to ask for their verbal consent at that time. This was then followed up with third-party information and consent forms (see Appendices 3 and 4) which were sent from the researcher via the parent.

Some third-party individuals gave consent verbally but did not return the information and consent forms to the researcher. In this instance the researcher followed British Educational Research Association (BERA) 2018 guidelines on this subject. BERA advises in instances where the methodology is concerned with the dynamic as a whole, as this research was, that ‘consenting individuals’ interactions with the non-consenting individuals may still be significant to the research’ (p. 12). As such, any non-consenting individuals would be blurred out of footage and anonymised in all transcripts, records, write ups and dissemination. This was the case with six of the fourteen third-party individuals who were personally identifiable in the video data. There were also instances where recordings (as supposed to live readings) caught a third party on camera. Third party information, including the eBook edition of the information book and consent forms, were sent to individuals where their faces were captured

in the recording because it constituted an identifying piece of personal data. When recordings were audio only consent was not sought, considering that the recorded material did not constitute a breach of data privacy as they were anonymised and no personally identifiable information was available. Where publicly available material was recorded in the video data, e.g., a celebrity reading on YouTube, again following BERA (2018) guidelines, consent was not sought because the material had been made publicly available (p. 10).

4.4.4 Incentives

No incentives were offered to co-researchers for taking part in this research. However, the researcher shared content with co-researchers when they submitted a piece of their video data in the form of reciprocal videos of the illustrator painting or the printer printing copies of the books (click links to view these). These were not professionally made videos, but rather curios which might be of interest to children. They were not dissimilar to the videos that co-researchers were asked to send to the researcher. Children and their families were also sent illustrated thank you cards with an image of the researcher saying ‘thank you’ (see Fig. 11) and a handwritten personal note inside. These were not supposed to be objects of value per se, but rather items which fostered a spirit of reciprocity between the researcher and co-researchers and kept a connection between them through the socially-distanced research process. The aim of these material objects was to create the sense that the researcher and co-researchers were, together, part of something: a phenomenon. These items provided children with something tangible to keep from the research to which they had contributed. The intention was to show them that they and their contributions were valued.

Fig. 11: Stack of thank you cards waiting to be sent out.

4.4.5 Theoretical interlude: Using sensitising theories and concepts in the information and consent process.

The details of the practicalities and design of the information and consent procedure used in this research (of which the creation of the picture book was central) including how it addressed adult/child power relations, as well as its limitations, has been written about extensively elsewhere (Smales, Lloyd and Rayner, 2023). This section of the research design segues to explore the theoretical underpinnings of this information and consent process and makes reference to the theory and methodology explored in the previous chapter. It suggests that creating an information and consent process which both aligns to the research paradigm and draws on practice theory and sociocultural versions of information literacy can influence the construction of the research act, which is always influenced by the researcher and their research instruments (Barad, 2003, p. 815, 826).

Flewitt (2019) argues that researchers can achieve clear principles for ethical research by:

> adopting a critically reflective, dialogic and relational approach to ethics that is in tune with the epistemological stance of their work, and is woven into every thread of the research process, from research design and methodological choices to final outputs and dissemination (p. 74).

The constructivist paradigm to which this research subscribes suggest that 'research acts are not given; they are constructed' (Charmaz, 2014 p. 13), in this way the researcher, the research situation and the methodological choices inform what is relevant or not in the field (Flick, 2019) and continually intra-act with one another (Howell, 2015). As such the researcher's responsibility for the information and consent process (along with other elements of the research design) will have an influence on how the research act is constructed and these constructions will, in turn, feed into the phenomena that makes up the research data.

Charmaz's turn to a constructivist version of grounded theory emphasises how the way in which we write about research evokes experiential feeling about that research: 'taking the reader into a story and imparting its mood' (Charmaz, 2000 p. 527). The methodology employed in this research suggests that this experiential feeling can be imparted through writing and story, not just when writing about data at the end of the research process, but also as the research begins. Imparting this experiential feeling to potential co-researchers signals the constructivist form of the research without explicitly going into the details of academic theory with a non-academic audience. This approach makes clear from the outset that the joint construction of research data encourages children's accounts, stories and feelings to come to the fore in their data construction – which as the literature review details is needed in scholarship about children's shared digital reading. Signalling this to co-researchers was done in this research ethics process through writing and story, as well as by the illustrations, paratexts and material objects included in the creation of the picturebook and its epitexts (e.g. postcards, videos, stickers and thank you cards).

Barad, in their agential realist conception, highlights how research ‘apparatuses produce differences that matter—they are boundary-making practices that are formative of matter and meaning, productive of, and part of, the phenomena produced’ (Barad, 2007 p. 146). Matter is an integral element in those research apparatus, where material objects are considered to be ‘agentive participants in the unfolding events’ (Kumpulainen *et al.*, 2022 p. 42). Information about taking part in research, in material forms including the digitally material, constitutes a piece of research apparatus and as such produces differences that make a difference and matter.

As discussed in the preceding theory and methodology chapter, agential realism dispenses with the idea of the independent entities; rather, entities entail each other in practice (Orlikowski and Scott, 2008 p. 456). By this reckoning, notions of an independent observer who uses neutral scientific tools – which would include bland information sheets about taking part in research – so too need to be dispensed with. This matters because by this conception ‘individuals emerge through and as part of their entangled intra-relating’ (Barad, 2007 p. ix) thus, individuals (the co-researchers) emerge into the research act as part of the their entangled intra-relating with the research apparatus including the information and consent process. Agency, as the theory and methodology chapter has detailed, is no longer an ‘individually bodied attribute or possession’ but rather a ‘distributed force enacted by humans and non-humans’ (Fairchild and Taylor, 2023 p. 5). This has implications for our notions of ‘consent’ – it is no longer something which can be given over by an individual, rather it is a distributed force which is enacted by those within the practice. As such researchers face a responsibility for the material-discursive practices through which information about research is given. They have responsibility for delivering this research in a manner which can be accessed by those from whom they are seeking consent.

How researchers present and conceive of the information and consent process changes the way the research is conducted. These material-discursive practices shape meaning and certain forms of knowledge through agential cuts which make the world known in certain ways (Barad, 2003, p. 815). Without acknowledging early on the framing of the research practice through this information and consent process (and the paratexts which accompany it) researchers are likely to produce sameness rather than difference (Barad, 2003 p. 826) despite the inclusion of innovative data collection and analysis methods. In this research an agential cut was placed within the information given to participants, whilst still adhering to all ethical guidelines. This cut added a level of subjectivity to the information book in the form of the illustrations and their fantastical elements and imaginings. These tell the potential co-researchers that humour, emotion, creativity and imagination have a place within the research taking place and encourages them to consider the research and their data collection in this way – whilst acknowledging the co-construction with the researcher.

It is also worth noting that the information and consent process in any research takes place as a practice 'grounded in everyday situated practices' (Feldman and Orlikowski, 2011 p. 1243) which is a 'materially bounded and situated action engaged in by members of the community' (Orlikowski, 2002 p. 256). As such the knowledge and learning – including forms of knowledge and learning which are required in order to engage with and understand information about taking part in research – 'do not exist within human brains, bodies or communities, rather it is something which is happening within the flow of everyday practice' (Orlikowski, 2002 p. 252). In addition, these information and consent activities are viewed through a practice theoretical lens as constellations of power 'where there is an ever present question about what can be done and who can do what' (Pilerot, 2014 p. 44). Again this places the onus and emphasis on the creator of that research information and consent process to consider how this practice will unfold in the everyday situated practices and how the

learning and understanding (which is considered necessary to fully participate (Yamada-Rice, 2017)) can be made in the moment.

Here the crucial role of information literacy becomes evident, because engaging with information about taking part in research is an information literacy practice. Understanding information literacy to be something which is enacted within a social setting and where it is embedded in the context in which the information practice is carried out, means that researchers must pay attention to how their information will be received into that social setting and context (Sundin and Francke, 2009; Lloyd, 2017). Information Literacy practices are shaped by discourse and practice which can enable some forms of information and constrain others (Lloyd, 2010c, p. 15): how we enable the information literacy of co-researchers or research participants depends upon many factors, some of which the research instruments can shape. Echoing Barad, meaning-making and identity come about in the performance of the practice and this can be through forms of tacit and nuanced information (Lloyd, 2010c, p. 3). How the potential co-researchers or research participants on the receiving end of the research information consider themselves, in light of that information, including the tacit and nuanced forms of information which includes the paratexts which frame it, will shape how they participate in the research.

This requires paying close attention to the modalities of information – social, epistemic and corporeal – which change the information landscape, that 'communicative space through which people develop identities and form relationships' (Lloyd, 2010c, p. 9) and play an influencing role in how co-researchers' identities and relationships are played out throughout the research process. Giving information to research participants in the form of a picturebook, for example, enacts a form of tacit and vernacular information communicated by the researcher. The inclusion of a familiar and presumably affectionately thought of object within the practice (in a research study which engaged those interested enough in shared

reading to request an information pack), is subject to teleoaffective structures. Teleoaffective structures govern 'the emotions and moods which people within a particular practice may acceptably express' (Schatzki, 2012 p. 16). Research into picture books points to these teleoaffective structures, showing that the quality of interactions are heightened when parents and children read together: children enjoy the opportunity to connect with their parents/carers and parents/carers have an opportunity to guide their children throughout the texts (Merga and Ledger, 2018 p. 177), that they promote internal and emotional state talk between children and adults (Brownell *et al.*, 2013; Garner and Parker, 2018) and that they contribute to children's understanding of the world (Bus, Van IJzendoorn and Pellegrini, 1995; Lysaker and Tonge, 2013). All of these are essential qualities when giving participants information about participating in research, where consent is considered legitimate *only* if it is accompanied by understanding of the terms of that research. They are also key qualities when considering how a respectful exchange of information can be promoted between children, parents/carers and the researcher (American Anthropological Association, 2012; British Sociological Association, 2017).

The epistemic modality of information also comes into play with the inclusion of a picturebook gaining provisional consent from children and informed consent from their parents. The material form and paratexts of such a material object allow for the practical understandings within the practice, which Schatzki defines as knowing 'how to carry out desired actions by basic doings and sayings' (Schatzki, 2012 p. 16). A picturebook, an everyday object in families with young children and with an acknowledged keen interest in shared reading, provides a familiar guide through the unfamiliar territory of academic research practices and procedures. The paratexts of this familiar object – a physical book or an eBook which includes the paratexts of a physical book – provide a sense of legitimacy and credibility (Dietz, 2019) because every paraxtextual element from a piece of back cover copy

to a university logo on the top of a sheet of A4 white paper '*cannot not* – serve as a paratext' (Genette, 1997 p. 25, his italics) and be influential. The paratexts of the information given ask people how to consider it: for example, 'please look on this book as a novel' (Genette, 1997 p. 11) or in the case of the paratexts of the information giving picturebook in this research: 'please look on this book as a sign of shared understanding, a friendly and respectful gesture towards how *you* do things, which I would like to understand'. The title (a peritext) *Space Explorers* which specifies the plural suggests that this is an object for parents and children to read together not individually, in this way exerting Genette's (1997) 'illocutionary force' (p. 10 - 11) directing readers on how to act in relation to the book.

The picturebook, as a shared object which included the researcher as a character within the book, designed to be read together by children and parents/carers, creates a site for participation. Wenger defines participation as 'the social experience of living in the world in terms of membership in social communities and active involvement in social enterprises' (Wenger, 1998 p. 55) and this becomes a source of identity (p. 56). This information and consent book allowed potential co-researchers to participate in that social experience of active involvement (Wenger, 1998 p. 55). For example, in creating their pseudonym (See Fig. 6) co-researchers constructed an identity for themselves as a co-researcher (or 'space explorer' as the book has it) in relation to the research community they are being asked to join. Some children rejected the names which the 'name finder' designated them and instead chose their own (for example, Flash Meteorite and Star Earth) at the urging of the text: 'if you really don't like it, you can choose another name!'

The illustrated book gave form to the experience of taking part in research through reification by producing an object which 'congeal[s] experience into "thingness"' (Wenger, 1998 p. 58). Children and their families were reimagined as 'space explorers' on a mission to complete a task. This signalled to them that they were not merely objects of study, but their

participation was active and important. These elements of participation and reification, Wenger (1998 p. 55) argues, are part of meaning-making. Being afforded the ability to make meaning from information also fulfils the needs of research guidelines. These suggest that information is given in a format suitable for potential participants' needs and capabilities (World Health Organisation, 2013; NHS Health Research Authority, 2023; UKRI, 2022).

In short, it is paramount that researchers adhere to their ethical responsibilities to the academy, but that they also consider and make greater efforts towards their responsibilities of their research participants, specifically in the form of their information literacy needs. To do this they must ensure that conditions are created, as far as possible, which allow for information literate individuals to emerge from the information literacy practice of information giving and that full attention is given to this process when both designing and writing up research. To do this, information literacy must be considered from a sociocultural point of view.

The creation of this picture book came about because of the socially distanced nature of the research environment and the REC's recommendation that no potential co-researcher could be approached in person. As a result, the in-person relationships which are usually built over time between researchers and the researched within physical spaces (see Lundh, Dolatkhah and Limberg, 2018; Hultin, 2019; Supski and Maher, 2021 for examples) were not possible. Instead, the relationship element of the research took a disproportionately large place in the information and consent process. In so doing, it shone a light on how the information and consent process can play a greater part in building the relationships within research constructions.

This process contributes to new knowledge in this area. Although other researchers have created innovative participant information (Lambert and Glacken, 2011; Mcinroy, 2017; Sutter *et al.*, 2020) including in story form (Mayne, Howitt and Rennie, 2016; Yamada-Rice,

2017; Arnott *et al.*, 2020), the experience of this researcher, as a former Communications Director in the children's publishing industry, offers a unique perspective for communicating with children through non-human objects and professional experience brings value to the academy (Stirling and Yamada-Rice, 2015; Yamada-Rice, 2017). This experience leant a credibility and legitimacy to this book because it meant being able to draw on professional contacts and a professional illustrator. Folding in an information literacy practice perspective provides scholarly knowledge from an academic discipline with a robust body of knowledge on the subject and offers a solution to Agosto's (2019) call for 'greater research creativity and perseverance' in gathering data directly from young people (p. 115).

The information and consent process reported here attempted to create 'a relationship with respondents in which they can cast their stories in their terms' (Charmaz, 2000 p. 525) by also constructing the researcher's version of the research in storied form, thereby sanctioning certain ways of knowing and being. All ethical criteria from the REC and wider institutions were met, meaning ethical rigour was not compromised. The creation of a picturebook builds on calls to consider children not as adults-in-training passing various prescribed developmental levels (Alderson & Morrow, 2012; James and Prout, 2015). It does this by giving them information to consent to research not only in a suitable form but also in a way in which they can draw their individual meanings in relation to their context and experience. It does this in an openly constructivist and agential realist way.

This research rejects the residual positivism which influences standardized or minimally modified information sheets which are included in qualitative research methodologies, and where their deficiencies are no doubt compensated for by the in-person relations between the researcher and researched. The information and consent process described here suggests the use of obviously constructed yet high quality and highly appropriate forms of information which promote the information literacy of co-researchers or participants in qualitative

research. This chapter now explores the methods which were used in the data collection and analysis for this research.

4.5 Methods

4.5.1 Video Data

Children and their families were asked to produce two videos for the researcher which showed their shared digital reading practices. Adults were asked to make or provide a pre-existing video of their children taking part in a shared reading practice where the listener and the person reading were not in the same room as each other. Children were asked to make and submit a video which explained how they had been reading, known as a child-led sensory tour (Green, 2016 p. 281). They were asked to focus on where they read, what they needed to do this and how everything worked. The videos were used not as a piece of extensive ethnographic fieldwork but rather as an 'elicited text[s] [which] involve research participants in writing the data' (Charmaz, 2014 p. 47) and which were intended to be used alongside children's semi-structured interviews in order to maximise the detail available (Erstad *et al*, 2020 p. 48). They were used to prompt 'thoughts, feelings and concerns' as well as 'give researchers ideas about what structures and cultural values influenced the person' (Charmaz, 2014 p. 47). The researcher specified that videos could be one minute long or more. The research design considers that the video data generated by participants is socially and technically constructed and is not an objective snapshot of reality (Hartel and Thomson, 2011 p. 2216).

Parent/carers uploaded video data directly to the UCL Data Safe Haven via a secure link emailed to them by the researcher. The Data Safe Haven is a secure server designed to safeguard high-risk research data, including video footage of children which includes personal identifiers. This method was chosen over collecting data via apps like PixStori

which has been used by other Information Studies researchers researching young children (Barriage in Barriage and Hicks, 2020). In the UK apps like PixStori do not comply with General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) data and privacy legislation because of a level of uncertainty about how co-researchers' data will be kept and stored on PixStori's servers, which are based in the USA and subject to different privacy laws. Data was saved using the children's chosen Space Explorer first name and initial of the second name. This shortened version of their Space Explorer name was also used as their pseudonym in the research write up. For example, a child whose pseudonym was Ash Voyager becomes AshV when writing up the research. Data was coded using constructivist grounded theory, which is discussed later in this chapter.

4.5.1.1 Research design and video methods

According to Ofcom reports (2015; 2019; 2022) a wide range of digital and visual media is used by children of all ages and 'thus indicate(s) how they are accustomed to making meaning through such technologies' (Yamada-Rice, 2017 p. 71). Smartphones and digital technology are also ubiquitous in the home and used by adults on a daily basis (Given *et al.*, 2016). Creating video, for both the children and parents/carers 'suit[ed] their ways of expressing knowledge and being in the world' (Yamada-Rice, 2017 p. 73). Whilst using these forms of technology for data collection enabled this research to take place in the socially distanced setting, it is important to note here that the Covid-19 lockdowns highlighted that technology was not ubiquitous in people's homes (Crew, 2020; Green, 2020). Many families didn't have laptops or tablets to access homeschool resources or to connect with people or to take part in research. As a result, this research needs to be understood to be investigating families who did have access to technology rather than suggesting that this is the norm.

The collection of child- and family-made video data was appropriate in a socially distanced context because a research setting where 'hanging out with, joining in with, talking

to and watching, and getting together the people concerned' (Schatzki, 2012 p. 25) was not possible. Video data provided a way of accessing children and their families' experiences without spending a prolonged amount of time with them indoors. The pandemic context also prompted the specification that short pieces of video data were acceptable. After over a year of lockdowns, school closures and social distancing, many of the parents had grappled with requests to adopt new home-schooling technological platforms, return school work and look after their children, many whilst working at the same time (Sonnenschein, Grossman and Grossman, 2021; Lin *et al.*, 2023). Asking for copious amounts of carefully crafted data in this context felt unrealistic, insensitive and off-putting to families, who might abandon their participation in the research altogether. Short pieces of video data also felt an easier fit with the lives of these busy families, where participating in research was being squeezed in between shifts at work, babies' naps and trips to the vet.

4.5.1.2 Child-led sensory tours

This research employed child-led sensory tours. Child-led sensory tours are advantageous because they can be open ended and last for as long as the child wishes to participate (Green, 2016 p. 282). Being able to hold the camera and film allows children a sense of ownership (Robson, 2011). As with other forms of co-researcher generated video data described above, they allow children's 'knowledge of routines [as] embodied and situated' to come to the fore (Storm-Mathisen, 2016 p. 85) which resonates with the claim that knowledge is concretely situated in the body and in certain situations and environments (Pink and Leder Mackley, 2013). This was showcased by one child co-researcher who had made his video sitting in the family car, as mentioned earlier. Later, at his request, this was where the semi-structured interview also took place. His rationale was that it had to be there because this was where he listened to the mp3 player which he had chosen to highlight in the research: the car was integral to the practice.

4.5.1.3 Non-invasive methods

Co-researcher-made videos proved useful: by virtue of being co-researcher-created they offered a non-invasive means of understanding children and their families' chosen shared digital reading activities. This non-invasive nature supports ethical research practice where participants can choose what to share and what to keep private and 'reduces the invasive nature of home-based data collection' (Flewitt, 2019 p. 70). Footage could be discarded without interaction with the researcher.

Concurrently, however, this did mean that parents could freely discard children's video data, potentially resulting in silencing aspects of children's experiences and leave the decision of what to include to the idiosyncratic nature of each parent (Aarsand, 2012). However, this concern had to be balanced with parents' right to further 'the best interests of their child' (UNCRC, 1989, Articles 3 and 18) including by providing 'direction to the child' (UNCRC, 1989 Articles 14 and 5) and that respect for carers and parents should be shown (UNCRC, 1989 Article 20). The idiosyncratic choices of each parent were also useful. They showed, in their selection of what is left in and left out, the parents' opinions and preferences for the practice. So long as they were recognised as indicative of the parents' preference and point of view, they provide rich and valuable data. All the video data in this study was considered to be representative of the parents' point of view as they had greater editorial control over it than the children, and as they were responsible for uploading it to the UCL Data Safe Haven. They were not representations of a truth, rather the constructions of realities. The research design sought to balance this adult control over the video data by only analysing and coding the semi-structured interview data given by children alongside the co-researcher-made videos.

The non-invasive nature of co-researcher-made videos allowed the researcher access to intimate and hard-to-reach settings like the home (Plowman, 2017) and to people and

communities who may not feel comfortable taking part in more traditional research methods (Hicks and Lloyd, 2018). Using co-researcher-made videos also meant that the researcher was not intruding into and disrupting private domestic spheres, which is a reported limitation when researchers are present in the home (Foss *et al.*, 2012), although this is not to suggest that the making of the video data caused no disruption. Lastly the non-invasive nature of co-researcher-made videos generated rich data. As reported by Aarsand (2012), as members of the community, co-researchers are most likely to produce data of interest to the researcher and this was the case here. They also included practices which the researcher had not considered previously, reinforcing Alderson & Morrow's (2012) recommendation of the method.

Data gathered by co-researchers, including data which was edited by parent co-researchers, would not be possible in other research settings like schools or in lab-based contexts (Danby *et al.*, 2013). Similar to Given *et al*'s (2016) findings, co-researchers in this study exercised their self-expression in generating data. They provided data pertaining to a wide variety of formats and settings from children on film in their pyjamas in bed, to the child making their sensory tour from the family car to the children who decorated their bedroom with their favourite books and toys for the research. As Hicks and Lloyd (2018) point out, co-researcher-gathered data offered access and insights into tacit and nuanced information about what co-researchers considered important to their practices and which is pertinent to the research questions of this study. This information is valuable because it allows the researcher to see the details of the practice, 'the micro pauses, the direction of the gaze, inflections in the voice, crying and laughing' (Danby, 2017 p. 40). In this way the social, corporeal and material aspects can be represented more accurately (Lloyd, 2021, p. 6) which forms a key aspect to consider when answering the research questions.

4.5.1.4 Evolution of video data collection in practice

In practice, the creation of these participatory videos was subject to the individual natures of the families involved. The videos which were collected ranged in length from twenty seconds to twenty-three minutes. The variety of data also varied. Some families sent videos or recordings which they had made during the lockdowns, which had been created to send to family members during this time. Whilst not originally intended for research, these were hugely valuable and used as data. Some videos were clearly staged for the research with habitual reading practices which had taken place during the school closures, like reading with a grandparent on screen, being reinstated for the purposes of the research. Instances of this have been reported elsewhere in LIS research using video data generated by families (Given *et al.*, 2016a p. 4).

Despite some staging of these practices for the purposes of recording them, children's reactions to the stories they were being told were not considered to be so: FinnN's eyes drooping as she lay listening to her Grandfather read her *Winnie the Pooh* via a Yoto player speaker; the three sisters who erupted into giggles at their grandmother's story, which featured the family as characters and poked fun at their parents; the irritation of WynnJJ as her younger sister repeatedly pressed the pause button on the narrated eBook they were listening to. These reactions had the characteristics of genuine intra-actions between families, their stories, books and technology and as such added value to the research. Co-researchers offered up and provided non-video data: the text of a made-up stories recorded digitally; photographs from during lockdown and of the places where precious books were kept in extended family members' homes. All this was treated as data following Glaser's (1967) dictum 'all is data'.

Many parents worried about whether they were 'doing it right'; many of them wanted their children to participate and it became necessary to remind them that they should not

coerce their children into this. Four children dropped out at the video-making stage because they were shy or changed their minds. Some children clearly relished the challenge of making their own video, decorating their rooms and wearing their favourite clothes: they were setting their stage. Several children spoke directly to the alien characters from the information book discussed earlier in this chapter, saying ‘Hello Aliens’ and ‘Over and Out’ to camera, suggesting that they were influenced by their research identities co-made with the information book. In this way the illustrated picturebook had enabled child co-researchers to make meaning about the research process. The picturebook gave form to the researcher’s understanding of the research process, reifying it: the picturebook ‘congeal[ed] this experience into “thingness”‘ (Wenger, 1998 p. 58). In turn, children demonstrated their intersubjective understanding of this interpretation of the research process by using the language of the book when making their videos.

Other children struggled to know what to do with such a wide brief, which was also found by Fargas-Malet *et al.*, (2010) in their study with child co-researchers. In these instances, the researcher provided the parents of the children with a brief set of questions which children could answer which served as a guide and frame for the research. Whilst these questions will have placed an adult-imposed structure over the children, this scaffolding technique was considered preferable to having the child not participate at all because of lack of guidance from the researcher.

Many of the co-researchers diverged from the request for a parent-made video and a child-made video. For example, KimE wanted to make two parent-made videos which filmed her reading with the families of each of her dads. She explained that it wouldn’t be fair to leave either one out, as she had read with one grandmother and the other plus her step-grandfather on alternate evenings over Zoom during the lockdowns. For KimE representing *her* way of shared digital reading necessitated two parent-made videos. At this point in the

data collection, the researcher accepted that the video data was literally being constructed by the co-researchers. This meant that not only the content of the videos was indicative of the co-researchers' experiences, but also the way the videos were structured and presented. To try and control it would be to try and control their meaning-making. Instead, these videos were embraced. The researcher relinquished the positivist desire to create uniform or tidy data and instead accepted the precious, valuable and often intimate data that was sent: children clutching teddies with thumbs in their mouths sitting on their bed, or wearing prized medals as part of their self-presentation. This was all considered as the families' construction of their practices and all was used as data. What was important to the co-researchers was important to the research.

As a result, there were no tidy piles of 'parent-made' videos and 'child-led sensory tours', which had been conceived of in the research design. There was just video data. Rather than being detrimental to the research design, this video data which was already acknowledged as 'socially and technically constructed' (Hartel and Thomson, 2011 p. 2216) by the constructivist perspective taken by this research design, which meant a shift from researcher-controlled data to a co-researcher centred viewpoint which generated rich data.

4.5.1.5 Learning through practice

The breakdown of the research design, which had assumed the tidy creation of both adult- and child-made videos, resulted in two pieces of learning-in-practice for the researcher. The first was that in the context in which the research was undertaken, some of the researcher's control had to be relinquished in order to gather rich data. As alluded to earlier, it is widely accepted that if researchers are in the setting with a video camera, data is altered by the apparatus of the research: the video camera and the researcher's presence. The practice of creating this research demonstrated how the apparatus of the research extends into the requests and boundaries which are placed on the co-researchers when they are asked to

generate data. Had the researcher gone back to co-researchers who had submitted their chosen and non-conforming research data and requested alternative or additional videos which did meet the criteria of the research design, this would have changed the nature of the research. It may have signalled, as many parents feared, that co-researchers had not ‘done it right’ and alienated those children and their families. If much needed research is to be conducted in the home as the scope of this study established, then researchers may find that they need to relinquish some control over that data collection. Digital media means that fieldwork and the production of data are aspects which may become increasingly distant to the researcher (Aarsand, 2016) which will in turn lead to questions about how to communicate the ethical requirements of the research to the co-constructors of the data such as co-researchers and research participants, which this research design has sought to address.

The second significant learning resulting from collecting participatory video data collection relates to the described control which the adult had in setting up and filtering the data sent to the researcher. Poveda (2019) reports that limitations in studies of this kind are often reported as data which ‘reflect[s] parental agendas and adult perspectives’ (p. 53). However as Livingstone and Blum-Ross (2017) suggest, this data is only ever ‘a partial text and is most illuminating when considered in relationship to the process of making it’ (p. 65). Understanding the veneer of parental control across all of the video data, including the child-made data in its many formulations, gives valuable insight into the relationality between parents and children. They do not exist in isolation from one another. Rather the parental control over data collection is ‘part of the nature we seek to understand’ (Barad, 2007 p. 26): it is part of the experience of childhood. Trying to remove the relations between the adults and the children by siloing off the data collection into child and adult-centric containers was to ignore an important aspect of being a child. Children’s perspectives do need to be represented to a greater extent in research but this needs to happen with acknowledgment that

the parents will likely influence what is done by children, just as they do in their everyday lives.

Agential realism here provides a useful guide: the instruments of research and the boundaries they draw can tamper with the realities of those who are researched. The limitations of the findings are said to correlate with the limitations of the methods but they also correlate to a reality of the findings: parents do exercise power over their children in many instances. Rather than reporting the above as a limitation of the research, this researcher embraced a research design which relied on co-researcher generated video and all that that entailed. Relinquishing control over the data creation meant that the co-researchers could push back on the proposed methods which sought to separate their entangled realities and instead produced messy, inconsistent, rich and illuminating data. This data revealed something about relationality in the way it was generated, as well what was contained within it, once again confirming that ‘forms effects meaning’ (McKenzie, 1999 p. 13). The entwined nature of children and their families and the power relations between them is part of the context in which everyday lives happen, including their shared digital reading practices and research practices relating to them.

4.5.2 Semi-structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews with children lasting between fifteen and thirty minutes were conducted in children’s homes, which is commensurate with other research where interviews with young children are used (Xu *et al.*, 2020; Supski and Maher, 2021). These were used to construct reflective data about their shared digital reading practices during the pandemic period of school closures and social distancing. The research design had originally been planned to include semi-structured interviews with parents, but as the aspects of parental control over the video data generation emerged, the research design was adapted to fulfil the aim of bringing children’s perspectives to the fore whilst still acknowledging that these

practices took place with others. As a result, although parent interviews were conducted, they were only subject to initial coding and were then put aside to focus on children's perspectives. In this way the methodology responds to Aarsand's (2016) observation of the imbalance in research between child and adult perspectives which highlights the issues of power within those relationships. It also responds to the findings of the literature review which reveal the need for children's perspectives. Taking the decision to disregard the parent interviews follows the agental realist perspective which guides this study. This argues that the researcher should take an active position within the inquiry. In this instance this involves a relational research design and analysis which decentres, but does not exclude, the adult and foregrounds the experiences of children. It does this to address the identified gap in the power relations between adults and children evident here and in other research findings (Aarsand, 2016).

After a period of uncertainty about how and when interviews would take place, all interviews took place in people's homes, frequently in outdoor spaces, where social distancing could be maintained. Parents chose the location for the interview. All co-researchers were offered interviews via Teams, embedded in the secure UCL server, but as plans to lift restrictions imminently were being widely reported in the media, all the families chose in-person meetings. This was valuable to the researcher because it meant that the objects which were used and sometimes the places where the reading happened could be shown to the researcher by the children who often explained what they did in situ.

4.5.2.1 Interviews as a fit for qualitative research

Interviews are used in qualitative research to discover what those taking part think, feel and remember about events; interviews allow people to answer on their terms and within their own capabilities, which provides them and the interviewer 'with the opportunity to clarify meanings and shared understanding' (Pickard, 2017 p. 197). Interviews also meet the

theoretical framework of this study as they reflect ‘participants’ temporal journeys through series of bundles and constellations’ (Schatzki, 2012 p. 25).

They also further the constructivist grounded theory method because their flexibility facilitated an engagement with ideas that was based upon co-researcher responses rather than on preconceived notions (Charmaz, 2014, p.85). Charmaz (2014) also emphasizes how interviews can be used to validate the participants’ humanity, perspective or action. This was essential when eliciting children’s views which, as the literature review has detailed are often overlooked. A constructivist approach to interviews emphasises seeking out co-researchers ‘definitions of terms, situations and events and try to tap his or her assumptions, implicit meanings and tacit rules’ (Charmaz, 2014 p. 32). This was a key factor in understanding how meaning was made, how information landscapes were constructed and what enabled and constrained the information literacy practices as situated for the children and which allowed tacit and nuanced forms of information to be uncovered.

4.5.2.2 Interviewing in home-based settings

The elements of families’ everyday lives created pauses, distractions and natural stopping-points for the interviews but also contributed to the richness of the data, reflecting the context in which these shared digital reading practices, as well as research practices, happened.
In the course of the interviews, timers for fish fingers cooking in the oven went off, toddlers fell over and cried, and a cat who had just returned from the vet with a cone on its head became the subject of great interest and fond amusement.

The home-based setting was advantageous as meetings in children’s homes has been shown to ensure a level of comfort and ease, especially for younger children who needed support from parents (Supski and Maher, 2021). Some parents remained sitting with the children when they were interviewed and others remained in the vicinity but not actively taking part in the interview. Parents were interviewed after the children and although that

interview data is not represented here (although it will undoubtedly have influenced the researcher's construction of the data) this was advantageous because it meant that parents made minimal interventions when the children were interviewed.

4.5.2.3 Building a rapport with young children

Irwin and Johnson (2005) report that interviews with children as young as four-years-old have been found to 'provide important insights into their daily lives' (p. 822). However, they also report that interviews with children also require significant rapport-building between the child and the researcher. Twenty-four children were interviewed: one dropped out because she was shy. The information book provided the opportunity for a rapport to be created ahead of meeting and children often greeted the researcher and immediately referred to her as 'Katharine' in a friendly way. Elements of the book were also used to create a connection between children and the researcher. Stickers of the alien characters were given on arrival, and the researcher showed them early illustrations of the book. Rapport was also built via intra-actions with the Dictaphone which was used to record the interviews. Children were asked to test if it was working by pressing the record button. During this test they were encouraged to speak loudly and the researcher stipulated that when she spoke, she had to speak more quietly. Once this had been done children stopped the recording and played it back and were able to say whether they felt that they had spoken loudly enough and the researcher had spoken quietly enough. This deliberate 'quietening' of the researcher was intended to make her an unthreatening presence who was not loudly intruding into the children's sphere. Amplifying children's voices and giving them control over the 'test' recording was intended to give them a sense of empowerment. Children expressed themselves and corrected the researcher if she made a mistake, which was taken as a sign that they were comfortable in representing their realities. For example, FlashM corrected the researcher when she referred to her 'Grandpa' instead of her 'Grandad'. For her, this name

was not interchangeable but rather representative of a significant and very specific person in her life who needed to be named correctly in her account.

4.5.2.4 Practicalities of interviewing children

The reliability of children's accounts and also their accuracy of their descriptions has also been reported as an issue in researching with children. In particular, if children are asked repeatedly about an event, even when it did not happen, many young children will say that it did happen if they are asked many times (Cremin and Slatter, 2004). Given *et al.* (2016a) suggest the use of observational methods to triangulate the data can mitigate these conflicting reports of what people do and what they say they do (p. 2). In this instance making the participatory video data ahead of the interview served an invaluable purpose. Having the co-researcher set the scene of what they did (even with the previously mentioned element of parental control) meant that the interview began on their terms with their explanations centring around the video data made a few days previously. In the earliest interviews the researcher showed the children their videos as a prompt ahead of the interview to reinforce the topic of discussion. However, this frequently created disruption as the device on which the video was shown became an object of interest and children suggested accessing other content via the device. As a result, in later interviews the interviewer referred to the video data but did not show it.

An interview guide was used where, following constructivist grounded theory, the questions were adapted after transcribing and coding the previous interview to reflect the themes or topics which came up (see Appendix 8 for the initial interview guide). However, there were many cases in which these guides were discarded as the topics explored entered into territory which the researcher had not expected, in keeping with the constructivist grounded theory method. Interview guides were useful in refocussing the co-researcher and researcher after an interruption, as described above, occurred.

Interviews were recorded using a Dictaphone. They were transcribed word for word by the researcher. There were times when a transcription service was used, often where siblings were interviewed together and it was difficult to distinguish one voice from another. In this instance transcription services offered a valuable digital addition, picking up the nuanced difference between children's voices in a way that the researcher couldn't when listening back to the recording. Data protection meant that commonly used transcription services like Otter.ai were not appropriate when researching young children. How the data was kept and stored on a third-party server could not be guaranteed. As a result, and after discussion with the UCL Information Governance team, the Microsoft Word transcription app, used within the researchers secure UCL Microsoft password protected domain was used.

4.5.3 Constructivist Grounded Theory analysis

Data analysis was carried out using the grounded theory method, which offers a set of 'general principles, guidelines, strategies and heuristic devices rather than formulaic prescriptions' (Charmaz, 2014 p. 3). Constructivist grounded theory is a method which is committed to understanding 'relations among entities in a shared terrain and to making an inventory of space' (Clarke, 2011, p. 41) and as such fits with the research design which takes the practice as the unit of analysis.

4.5.3.1 Data collection and analysis

Data collection and analysis was done simultaneously in an iterative process (Charmaz, 2000, 2014). Comparing each piece of data to other pieces of data allows the researcher to develop analytic conceptualisations of the possible relations between the data (Pickard, 2017 p. 269). Coding was done by marking up the transcribed interviews as well as transcriptions of the video data and coding of the video data as it was being watched 'live' (Parameswaran *et al*, 2020). Parameswaran *et al* (2020) suggest that coding both transcripts of video data and

simultaneous coding whilst watching/listening to recordings provides a comprehensive approach to dealing with video data. The study's emphasis on the actions between and among people and things meant employing gerunds when coding. This helped to ground the analysis in the data rather than from extant theories when generating the initial codes. However, using gerunds, which focus on action, was at times challenging when iteratively coding data relating to children because children often describe having things 'done to them' or 'for them' rather than actively doing them, again reflecting the ever-present power dynamics in children's lives.

Carrying out coding between interviews was a useful process in sense-checking adult and child dynamics, including those of the researcher and the child co-researcher. For example, in many interviews the word 'happy' was used by children. The researcher, at interview, was initially dismissive of this, seeing it as a pat response. However, when confronted with the data and seeing the word 'happy' on the page again and again, it suggested to the researcher that this needed to be taken seriously. Ongoing interviews asked questions about emotions and experiencing certain emotions whilst taking part in shared reading. As the coding process developed, codes were grouped together mapping out potential concepts in an ongoing comparative process.

The second phase of the process followed focussed coding which involved looking at the attributes of the grouped codes and beginning to build categories from them. Creating categories allowed the researcher to conceptualise and move to a more abstract theoretical position in understanding how the initial codes fit together (Hultin, 2019). It served to move from the detail and complexity of the data to focus on the essential features including relations between things (Dey, 1993 p. 100). This was done whilst still relating back to the data and codes in order that the emerging theory remained grounded in the data, rather than influenced by pre-existing theories (Charmaz, 2014 p. 115). The researcher also took the

recommendation of Saldana (2021) to make a list of the top ten quotes from the data which were meaningful to the researcher and examine these in detail (p. 344). This was a useful exercise and these quotes form the basis of the sub-headings of the Findings chapter (Chapter 5). The Findings chapter is divided into sections which comprise the codes and categories which emerged through coding using constructivist grounded theory. Each code is accompanied by the chosen direct quote from the child which best represents the meaning of that code. Two of the codes were 'in vivo' codes (Saldana, 2021 p. 7) where the code is taken directly from words of the co-researcher. These two sections represented by in vivo codes do not include an additional quote from the child as they already represent the child's perspective and so remain as standalone quotes at the top of their sections.

During this phase of the research codes and categories morphed: sometimes two codes merged into one and at other times a major code was broken down into two parts to better explicate the emerging theory. One major category had several names considered for it over time. Originally conceived as 'creating', this moniker failed to capture the highly personal nature of the category. 'Engineering' and 'connecting' were considered, but these then omitted the creative aspects. Finally, 'customising' was found to fit best with the data. Categories and their definitions were worked up through a memo-ing process throughout the process consistent with constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2014).

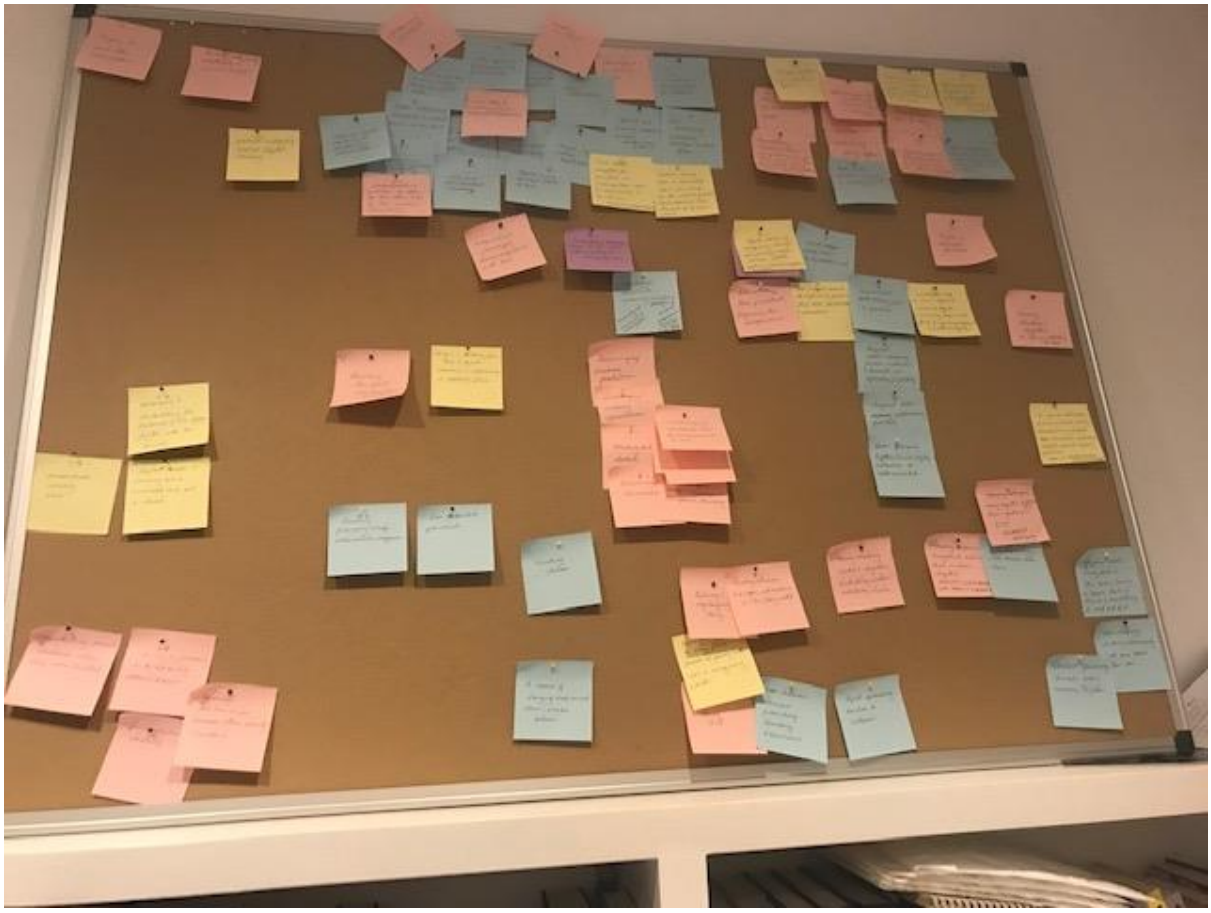


Fig. 12: Pinboard showing codes as they were narrowed down and at nascent stage of grouping into categories.

4.5.3.2. Theoretical sampling

Theoretical sampling allows the researcher to focus on finding new data sources 'that can best explicitly address specific theoretically interesting facets of the emergent analysis' (Clarke, 2007 p. 425). In this study it was not possible to return to the field to conduct theoretical sampling. As previously detailed the data collection took place just as social distancing measures were ending and school was breaking up for the long summer break. The majority of families in this study, who had endured two school closures and a total disruption to their normal family life, were keen to get away as soon as the summer holiday started and lifted social distancing measures allowed. As a result, the researcher did not approach them

for second interviews or more videos. This could have been done later in the summer or in September when schools returned. However, the researcher felt that there would not be appetite from the co-researchers to do this and in addition it felt important to preserve the integrity of the data collected during social distancing. In short, the context in which the data was collected felt like a unique and momentary opportunity to capture these shared digital reading practices, which were also unique to the context.

Instead, an alternative tack was taken, by using theoretical sampling with the video data already taken. Although sampling often happens with people, according to constructivist grounded theory, new data sources can be found by sampling things (Charmaz, 2000; Clarke, 2007). The influence of paratexts had become evident in early coding. As such the researcher returned to the video data to code from the point of view of the paratext. Doing this allowed the practice, understood as 'a material-discursive field of action' to be explored by zooming in on a material element showing how paratexts, 'within the flow of everyday practice [could] performatively enact conditions of possibilities' (Hultin, 2019 p. 96).

Theoretical sampling was also conducted by coding with attention only to the bodily movements of the co-researchers in their submitted videos. Following Ellingson (2017) the researcher attended to a range of non-verbal communication elements including body language, the proximity of people and things, tones of voice, touch and body contact, appearance and the configuration of the physical environment associated with a person as well as interactions with material objects.

This was done by 'live coding' (Parameswaran *et al,* 2020) on large sheets of paper and using different coloured markers to focus on different embodied elements. This focus on the embodied and material aspects of the data allowed the researcher an alternative view of the practice recognising its material and embodied nature (Nicolini, 2012). Being able to employ

this form of theoretical sampling as a result of employing visual methods shows how they can extend ‘both the scope and the impact of grounded theory method’ (Hicks, 2018a p. 197).

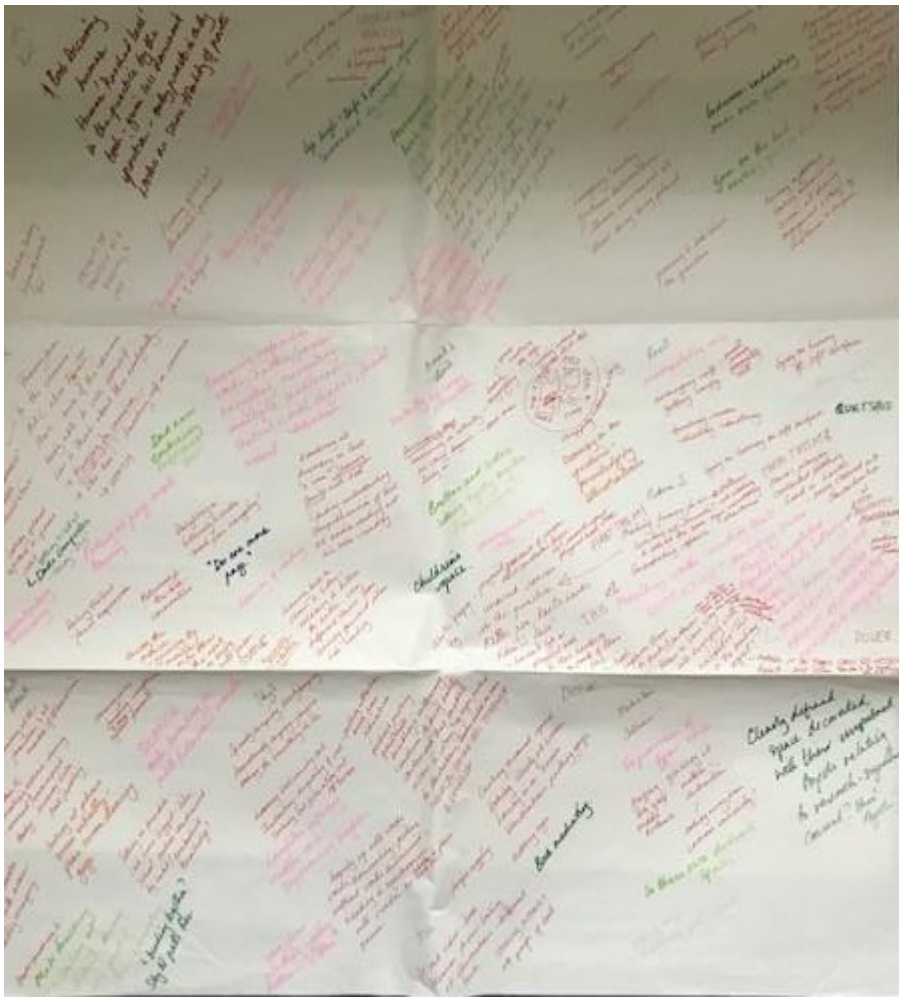


Fig. 13: Live coding sheet

In this study, credibility was achieved through methodological congruence, that is the harmony between the theoretical and methodological frameworks employed. It was also achieved through the memo-ing process and through a trail of codes and categories documented and stored at each stage throughout the process. The confirmability of the study was achieved by the scope and depth of the data as well as the data giving a full view of the study (Charmaz, 2014 p. 32). Data was considered sufficient as it enabled the portrayal of co-researchers stated and unstated views and actions over the period of time in question as well as an insight into the complexities of their lives (Charmaz, 2014 p. 33).

4.6 Compliance

The nature of this research which involved researching young children by collecting video data required rigorous compliance procedures to ensure their protection and privacy. This research design followed the high-risk ethics route at UCL. It complied with the UCL Code of Conduct for Research (2013), the UCL Principles of Integrity, GDPR and the Data Protection Act 2018. The researcher was DBS checked and underwent GDPR, Data Protection, NHS digital data and UCL Data Safe Haven training as well as REDCap training to ensure there was secure provision for parents sharing their email addresses. The researcher provided the Department of Information Studies with an ethics form, completed a high-risk application to the UCL REC, completed a risk assessment for fieldwork once in-person meetings became possible and registered the project with the UCL Information Governance Team. All processing of personal data was compliant with GDPR (2018) and UCL's data protection policy. In accordance with the GDPR and BERA 2018 guidelines, all participants were given information about how and why their data was being stored, what it was being used for and to whom it will be made available and in what form.

All transcripts of interviews were sent to parent co-researchers to check. Parent co-researchers were given two months from the date they were sent the interview transcript to withdraw from the study if they wished. This was considered a reasonable and respectful amount of time for co-researchers to consider if they would prefer not to be part of the study. No co-researchers withdrew at this stage.

Sensitive personal data such as videos of children were given additional protection by being directly uploaded by parents onto the Data Safe Haven, UCL's highest security network. Anonymity at the point of data storage was undertaken by using pseudonyms, which had been designated at the time of information giving by giving participants an 'alien name' which they could do by taking part in an activity in the information book *Space Explorers.*

This name was then shortened to their first name and initial of their second name. This occasionally backfired when two children with the same initials (although not the same names) ended up with the same 'space explorer' names. Rather than change their names, the researcher added a number to the end of their names, resulting in RobinN and RobinN2 for example. Faces were blurred in stills from the video footage when used in dissemination of the findings. Parental emails were retained on the UCL Data Safe Haven in order to seek permission for further use of data in future if necessary.

4.7 Limitations

4.7.1 Limitations relating to co-researchers

An immediate limitation of this study's methods was that the co-researcher families who responded to the call for participation, had all had positive experiences of shared digital reading during the period of social distancing. Anecdotally, as the researcher discussed the subject of research during the course of the PhD, many people said that they had engaged in the kind of shared digital reading practices explored in the findings section; some reported success and others reported that their attempts to construct reading practices for their children had not worked at all.

There were also families who expressed an interest in joining the research but their current family circumstances ultimately meant that they couldn't commit to joining. One mother was in hospital and reported reading eBooks via video each night with her son to stay in touch, yet she explained that it was the very circumstance of her hospitalisation which made it difficult to make a commitment to the study. Another family who initially joined the study, dropped out because their child's chronic medical condition was worsening. Finding ways to access families in challenging circumstances, and allowing them to create research

data in ways and in timeframes which suit them, is a potential area for further investigation in future studies.

An obvious and essential limitation to recognise in this research is that it is not representative of most children's experiences during the pandemic, either world-wide (Bao *et al.*, 2020; Akinrinmade, Ammani and Zuilkowski, 2021; Sanrey *et al.*, 2021) or in the UK (Best, Clark and Picton, 2020; A Cole *et al.*, 2022; EEF, 2022). Like all qualitative research, this research is localised and particular. In the UK, Ofcom (2022) reports that thirty-six per cent of children did not always have access to an adequate device in their homes (p.2). This access to digital technology divides on economic grounds. Green's (2020) study of schoolwork during the first UK lockdown in 2020 found that twenty per cent of children on free school meals had no access to a computer at home compared to seven per cent of other children (p. 10). Crew's (2020) report for The National Literacy Trust supports this, stating 'many low-income families [didn't] have adequate access to a device or connectivity at home' (p. 2). In addition Daniels *et al.*, (2020) suggest that children in less affluent homes may have had access to digital devices but that they might be of inferior quality and/or they might rely on free apps which lack the creative potential of paid content. (p. 2416). The families who took part in this study were from middle class backgrounds and often had multiple digital devices meaning that this study needs to be seen as representing families who had access to technology rather than assuming this to be the norm.

The pandemic experiences of children from disadvantaged backgrounds are well reported to have been different from those of children from better off backgrounds (EEF, 2022). The disparity extends to the nature of the activities families engaged in at home during the pandemic (Sanrey *et al.*, 2021). Crew, (2020) reports that a contributing factor to this was middle class families' greater access to online activities which would support the home learning environment (p. 2). The number of books in the home have also been used as a

proxy for socio-economic status in large scale international assessments (Classick and Hope, 2021). The children in this study had access to books in their homes, and in many cases in the homes of their extended family members, again suggesting that this cohort of co-researchers were from middle class backgrounds and were heavy readers.

Related to the above it is also vital to 'carefully consider to whom our account refers' (Dey, 1993, p. 269). Similar to the work of Lin *et al.*, (2023) this study did not include any analysis of the variations by cultural background but some of the homogeneity of the findings suggests that the cultural backgrounds of the families who took part were similar. Cultural attitudes to shared reading differ (Kucirkova and Grøver, 2022) for example in Melzi, Schick and Scarola's (2019 p. 129) study of Latino families shared reading was sometimes viewed as a punishment. The National Literacy Trust also reports regional differences in attitudes towards reading in the UK (Billington, 2015) and this study was entirely conducted in London. Lastly, some parents told the researcher that their children had special educational needs or disabilities. This was not something which was referred to in the research data by the children, who may not consider their condition to be a disability or of importance when it came to their reading activity. The majority (although not all) of the cohort of co-researchers were able-bodied children and this means this does not take into account the many and varied ways in which reading happens (Lundh, 2022). It is recognised that this research was limited to an exploration of one group in one geographic location at one point in time.

The make-up of the cohort of co-researchers gave the researcher pause for thought. Whilst being able to approach people directly about joining the research in the south-east London community might have resulted in a more diverse group of co-researchers, the researcher also acknowledges that the research design may also have attracted a certain set of co-researchers. The research design employed relied on an illustrated picturebook which will have been a familiar object in certain, but not all, families' homes. Recognising that research

is a construction of the researcher and this researcher's realities, this researcher considered that this PhD might be nothing more than a reification of her own family's lockdown experience with reading. Whilst this can be acknowledged here in the research, it poses a problem for future research. This reflection meant that halfway through the PhD process the researcher began to volunteer in the library of a primary school where over half of the children are on pupil premium (funding to improve education outcomes for disadvantaged pupils), fifty-one per cent have English as an additional language and there is a higher-than-average proportion of children with special educational needs and disabilities. This then extended into running a volunteer reading scheme with UCL where student volunteers read one-to-one with children whose reading attainment was affected by missed school during the pandemic. It is hoped that engaging with and taking part in everyday reading activities with a diverse group of children will allow a form of long-term learning-in-practice for the researcher and that this might help to produce alternative research design for future studies.

4.7.2 Methodological limitations

Researching with children did not always produce the most insightful interview data. The everyday accoutrements to their lives were a very real part of the data collection process when interviewing them. Recordings of interviews reveal dancing llama toys playing music or toys crashing from shelves and tables. Transcripts noted one child hung off a bunk bed ladder throughout the interview. Another child requested to leave the research, went off to jump on a trampoline, only to begin answering the questions posed to his brother as he continued to bounce.

The video data produced for this research varied in its length and quality. Although the researcher had briefed co-researchers on camera angles and lighting ahead of time, young children holding the cameras created mixed results. These short pieces of footage already discussed were often taken in the middle of the reading activity, presumably to get children

and others settled into the practice before turning on the camera. This meant that the opening of the reading was often missed, where vital paratexts acting as framing devices or contact between children and those reading to them took place.

The researcher also acknowledges it was only possible to go so far into these practices which, as the findings show, were based on personal relationships. The researcher and the camera as instruments of research breach the private sphere of the practices under inquiry (Aarsand and Forsberg, 2010). AliS's mother reported by email that she tried to capture AliS and his grandmother laughing together as their read over Zoom, but as soon as she opened the door they stopped. As Wenger (1998) puts it 'peripherality can be a position where access to practice is possible, but it can also be a position where outsiders are kept from moving further inward' (p. 120). Part of the nature of these practices and these communities of practice was that they were not for public consumption.

4.7.3 Contextual limitations

The imminent lifting of social distancing restrictions, which has been discussed earlier in this chapter, combined with the fast uptake of co-researchers (in around one week) and busy families' availability for taking part in research, meant that research moved at a pace which was not necessarily what the researcher had intended. Although the researcher followed the constructivist grounded theory process of analysis taking place alongside coding, there was little time for lengthy reflection on coded transcripts between interviews. A planned pilot study was transformed into a swift write up of the data from the first five co-researchers. Flick (2019) recommends that grounded theory is not conducted at pace and time is needed to conduct the entire programme of the approach (p. 14). In future studies a research design which built in more time between interviews would be preferable.

4.7.4 Ethical limitations

The established and accepted need for anonymity in this study took some of the colour from the findings. For example, children had a wide and imaginative range of personal names for their grandparents who featured heavily in this research. However, in order to preserve anonymity, the findings refer to all grandparents as 'Grandma' and 'Grandpa'. Likewise blurring children's faces in the stills, again an accepted ethical requirement taken from the video data, literally removes the emotion and engagement from the children's faces. This has an impact on how the research findings are presented (Nutbrown, 2011). As Harraway puts it 'there is no unmediated photograph' (1988 p. 583). Any photograph is 'yet another artifice' (McKenzie, 1999 p. 48) and whilst all stills in research are chosen and constructed, the construction of blurring a child's face, with its connotations of criminality (Nutbrown, 2011) lends an uneasy air to the presentation of the findings in a research design which sought to surface children's experiences. Lundh's (2011) solution of illustrating stills from video data is not a skill which this researcher possesses and the ethical implications and practicalities of sharing secure video data with an illustrator (such as the illustrator of the picture book) were too complex to arrange given the time frame of funding for this PhD. How ethical and data protection requirements can be met whilst conveying children's experiences by bringing the storytelling and abductive clarity that Charmaz advocates to the research (2000, 2014), particularly the visual data, is a challenge for future research designs.

4.8 Chapter conclusion

This chapter has outlined the methodological choices that were made within this study's research design. The chapter started by demonstrating how children and their families' perspectives were sought in a socially distanced context and how, following the theoretical and methodological stance of the study, the nature of the research design was considered to

influence the co-creation of research data. It focused on the research methods used showing how video methods allowed a visually mediated focus and how semi-structured interviews foregrounded children's perspectives. It then explored how constructivist grounded theory provided the flexibility to explore and analyse human and non-human perspectives within the data. The findings that were produced through these methods of data generation and analysis are presented in the next chapter.

Chapter 5: Findings

5.1 Chapter overview

In this chapter, data produced from child and parent-made videos and semi-structured interviews with children is presented. This analysis, via constructivist grounded theory, examines the characteristics of children's shared digital reading experiences, and identifies four categories generated by constructivist grounded theory coding. These categories are *longing*, *customising*, *navigating* and *belonging*. The four categories subsequently establish the overarching theme, *binding together*, which constitutes the constructivist grounded theory**.** This chapter explores these categories, and the overarching theory they contribute to in detail. This provides an explanation of how shared digital reading practices were put together and negotiated by children and their families to keep connection with one other during a time of separation.

5.1.2 Overview of findings

Twenty of the children who took part in the research focussed on reading practices which involved their extended family and teachers. The remaining five children co-created their research data on listening to audiobooks, read-aloud functions of eBooks and watching YouTube story videos (see Table 1). One child, KitC, chose to focus on the read aloud function of eBooks but also discussed his teacher reading to him via Google Classroom

during his interview and his data on that subject is included in this analysis. This chapter and analysis focusses on the practices reported by the majority of the children who read with extended family and teachers. Several children submitted more than one piece of data, highlighting different ways which they read with different people (See Table 1).

Within these reading practices with extended family and teachers, the research data revealed variations in how children and their families constructed and conducted these practices, which supports the assertions that there is more than one way of reading (Tattersall Wallin, 2021; Lundh, Hedemark and Lindskold, 2022) and that theoretically paying attention to heterogenous practices is a fruitful area of inquiry. As reported in the literature review, the low figure of children reading eBooks in 2021 quoted as 6.4% by Nielsen BookScan in 2021 and the NLT's findings that 77% children aged 5 – 8 read stories on paper (Cole *et al.*, 2022 p. 26) are reflected in the findings of this study. These findings also show that whilst the use of eBooks was not prevalent, digital technology was used in children's shared reading practices at this time supporting evidence that digital technology is widespread in many children's lives (Ofcom, 2022). The variations in reading are represented in Table 1.

5.2 The Theory of Binding Together

This study has explored how shared digital reading practices between children, parents, their extended families and teachers were formed during the lockdowns and periods of social distancing during the Covid-19 pandemic. The **Theory of Binding Together** surfaces from this study. It describes how the **longing** for familiar people and activities experienced by children was allayed by parents through the creation of shared digital reading activities, which drew in extended family, teachers and the children themselves, who also took part in their creation. For children who were suddenly isolated from their extended networks, these activities maintained their connection to others. Working together, people **customised** shared digital reading activities to reflect pre-established in-person ways of reading which were

recreated by tailoring technology. **Customising** also involved seeding affective sources of information within these activities; this included books which had been read by a family for generations or creating personalised stories or recordings.

The digital setting sometimes limited people's ability to mediate information and children reported that their physical separation from others had an impact on their reading experience. Despite this the participants learned to **navigate** these customised shared digital reading activities. **Navigating** customised digital activities, which recreated familiar configurations of shared reading by using familiar physical books or personalised recordings, enabled children and their families and teachers to draw upon their understanding of in-person shared reading activities, like reading before bedtime or reading as a class at storytime. This provided a space for children and their close circle of connections to spend time together, creating a shared experience during an otherwise isolating period. Material elements of physical books including covers, author or illustrator names and illustrations prompted conversation and engagement between people. Props, costumes and the settings of the recordings created an atmosphere which suggested how the recording was to be understood: as relaxing or funny or escapist, for example. Children were able to observe more experienced readers navigating these material aspects of physical books, prompting discussion or physical reactions between them, creating a collaborative experience. Experienced readers used their embodied understanding of reading, via voice and facial expressions, to unlock the text: children interpreted the pitch of readers' voices to make meaning, or people exchanged looks of surprise, excitement or disgust at elements of the story, creating and communicating a shared understanding of the text.

Novice readers drew meaning from the available information not only in relation to the text of the story, but also in relation to their identity as part of the group. This identity was highlighted through references to the favoured books which had been read for generations, in-

jokes and dedications planted in story recordings and through choosing books with themes which acknowledged children's interests or situation during the pandemic. Additionally, their extended family and teachers were able to signal their love and care for the children through shared smiles and laughter, recreating physical games together across the screen as well as offering words of encouragement. A sense of **belonging** was evoked by drawing on these varied information sources which created a space for a shared experience during isolation, referenced people's past experiences together and reinforced children's identity as valued members of the group. Children understood that they were part of a piece of collective emotional work on the part of their parents and extended communities, work which sought to ensure their happiness and wellbeing. They understood their own importance to those people who were, in turn, important to them. This process connected groups of people through reading activities and promoted a sense of wellbeing and togetherness at a time of uncertainty, thereby **binding together** children, families and communities, along with certain stories, books and ways of reading.

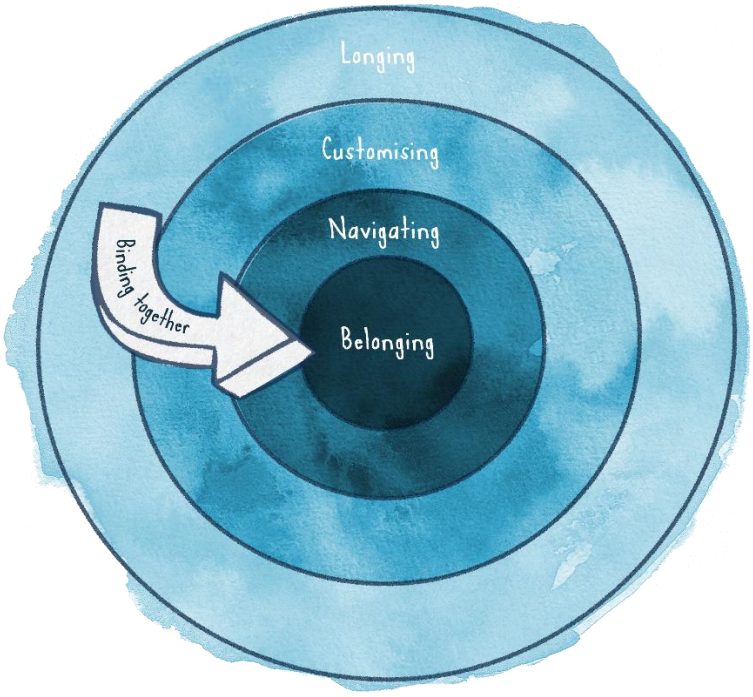


Fig. 14: The Theory of Binding Together

5.3 Longing

Longing refers to a desire by the children to engage in routine activities, which included but were not limited to reading practice, which have been withheld or which have never been directly experienced. *Longing* is accompanied by children's strong sense of their place and identity as an active participant in the activities in question, in their relationships with the others taking part and as well as to those on the margins of the activity. Children in this study expressed longing relating to a variety of different factors from the mundane – being bored in their beds in the morning and wishing for something to do – to the aspirational – the hope of being bought an Alexa for their room. However, the most widely reported sense of longing was related to their isolation and separation from their immediate community which comprised of a close circle of connections: extended family and teachers and the places associated with them. They were unable to access these people and places as a result of social distancing and geographical distance, bound instead by rules and regulations relating to the pandemic.

Immediate community is defined here as people who are known to the child co-researcher personally and include extended family members like grandparents, cousins, aunts and uncles as well as teachers and class groups. The immediate community are those who children spend time with regularly and over extended periods of time. They are people who children feel they know well and who know them well. They are part of a collective group with the child, either a family or a school group, for example. Children had a sense of the wider network to which they belonged, describing how things were done in their classes, how their parents were their grandparent's children, understanding that their parents had once been children and referring to wider family spanning from cousins to great grandparents:

> Probably because she's got one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten, eleven grandchildren! She had three boys, two of them are my uncles and one of them is my dad. – JoS
>
> Because [Grandad] is Mummy's Daddy! – StarE

At this time, separation from their immediate community was exacerbated by the lockdowns and social distancing measures relating to the Covid- 19 pandemic; travelling to see extended family was difficult and schools had been closed for extended periods of time. The lockdowns and other social distancing measures meant children found themselves in a situation in which normal activities and routines had been significantly curtailed.

5.3.1 *'Stay home and don't go far from home'*: Inhabiting a smaller world

During the lockdowns children were bound by a constrained world. They were restricted to their own homes apart from short periods of time outside. For some children there was a sense of drama around schools and shops suddenly closing and this new way of living. Adopting new pandemic terminology, these children talked about 'essential shops', 'lockdown', 'covid' and 'working from home'. They gave explanations about what these were and what they had meant for their families. Anxiety, fear, and uncertainty also manifested in certain children's descriptions of carefully gleaned information about the virus:

> It was kind of scary, because we couldn't go out. When I first heard of 'isolation', I thought it was cold and you had to be iced. – AliS
>
> It's like, err, like a really big bug that's spreading really bad at the moment. It's getting worse… - KitC
>
> It's this kind of illness that you can die from, because your lungs don't… it stops you breathing from your lungs. And if you get it long enough you might die – RaeO

However, for many of the children in this study, the experience was characterised by inconvenience. This smaller world was characterised by a strong sense of longing for people and a desire to access the outside world:

> We couldn't really go to parks, we couldn't really go to schools either, we had to do home learning – KimE

Many of the children described the experience as boring. Feelings of anxiety and boredom have been reported in other studies into children's experiences of the pandemic (Sun *et al.*, 2021; Ebert, 2022; Mutch and Romero, 2022). However, most of the children in this study also found some enjoyment in this smaller world, less schoolwork, more TV and time online, playing games and spending time with the family they lived with. For four-year-old NovaA when asked about the lockdown her first response was 'family days, family days.' Although acknowledged in the chapter on research design, it is necessary to again contextualise this finding in the wider research on the impact of the pandemic on children, which suggests that children experienced the pandemic differently according to their parents' individual circumstances, including their education, employment and income (Classick and Hope, 2021; OECD, 2021).

Being separated from everyday places and people impacted on the daily lives and routines of families. Read *et al.*, (2022) found that this was the case particularly families with young children, as the majority of the families in this study were. These experiences of separation were unique to the child, their family and their circumstances. Experiences differed between siblings and classes. For FlashM, the second lockdown meant that her younger sister could attend nursery but she was not able to go to school and had to stay at home for several months. JoS described how the children attending the after-school club at his school had to self-isolate for ten days (during data collection) in July 2021 because:

> Someone in my class got covid and they were at an after-school club… only for one hour… and so that whole after-school club also needed to shut down … - JoS

RobinN2 and FinnN2 had travelled with their mother and baby sister to their mother's home country on the eve of the first national lockdown. From the children's point of view, they were going for a holiday. Their mother told a different story, explaining that they had travelled so she could say goodbye to her favourite aunt who was dying of cancer. The children described how they and their mother had to remain in this country for the entire first lockdown (late March to June 2020) separated from their dad in the UK.

There was also a temporal element to longing. For some children lockdown was a fleeting moment: WynnS described having the day off school. KitC described the school closures as going on for between ten and fifteen days. However, for some, including AliS, it was an unprecedented experience which went on for some time. Here he describes putting figures outside his house to ward off the virus:

> We did put some action figures outside on the windowsill and they were the corona fighters and my Darth Vader always fell off because he was jumping after the virus... There's one power ranger and he was red, but then he turned pink because of the sun – AliS

Fig. 15: AliS and his dad putting action figures on the windowsills to ward off the virus

5.3.2 *'We never get to see them in real life'*: Missing immediate community

For many of the children in this study the pandemic was merely a backdrop where the major impact was in relation to their separation from the immediate communities in their lives. This separation was often the first subject brought up by children at interview and only related to the pandemic later. Those people in their immediate communities often did not live in the same city or even in the same country as the children and the pandemic made contact with them even less frequent:

> We can't just go across the motorway [to see his grandmother] because of covid – RaeO

Children had designated places in their extended families' homes or in their classrooms as well as well-trodden habits and routines. One of the well-trodden habits for these children and these important people in their lives was shared reading, which comprised unique information landscapes (Lloyd, 2010c; 2021). with their own particular traits:

She'd [Grandmother] do tickleback. It's either before she reads to me or after. She just scratches your back. And it tickles – AliS

StarE: When he's reading stories um… he goes to sleep.

Researcher: What? He goes to sleep. Is he actually asleep?

FlashM: No, he's just pretending.

Researcher: What do you do when he pretends to go to sleep?

FlashM: I shout, I usually shout.

StarE: Waaaaakkkeee UUUUP!'

The places where reading took place also mattered to children. WynnS described reading time at school and how the whole class got to vote for which book they would read, and how she would sit next to her friend listening with her hands resting on the furry carpet:

Researcher: How does it feel when you are sitting there on the carpet in the classroom?

WynnS: Good.

Researcher: And why do you feel good?

WynnS: Because it is nice and furry

Children associated their immediate community with feelings of happiness and relaxation. They found a sense of connection through engaging in activities, understanding each other's lives and because of prized personality traits - often being funny or silly. Children also had a strong sense of how important they themselves were to their significant others by how they felt about them:

StarE: He likes us… and he loves me and he's funny.

Mourning their separation from these family members children understood that these family members, in turn, felt sad being separated from them:

Researcher: How does [being apart from Grandma] make you feel?

RaeO: Sad.

Researcher: Yeah, how do you think Grandma feels?

RaeO: Sad as well.

Longing grew out of the strong links between children, their families and their schools and the shared information environments which they were associated with, knowledgeable about, embedded within and from which they had been detached. As a result, parents and other adults mediated digital technology to maintain connection during the periods of required isolation, customising shared digital reading practices allowing children to reconnect with their immediate community.

5.4 Customising

Customising characterises the creation of information landscapes in the form of bespoke shared digital reading activities in digital environments which reference known in-person shared reading activities using available tools of practice (Lloyd, 2010c), in this case digital devices, stories and people. These tools are used to design and facilitate a practice which has been tailored to suit the reading matter and the people in the circumstances in which they find themselves, to reflect familiar ways of reading and to continue a community of practice (Wenger, 1998) and by exposing children to information which reinforces their identity and sense of group membership. *Customising* involves modifying objects, creating texts and presenting people with a directed choice of reading material as well as constructing physical and digital spaces to facilitate shared experiences to enable connection between people. *Customising* was generally spearheaded by women, mostly mothers, with others in supporting roles, creating a shared endeavour. Adults were primary in setting up the practice around the child and for the child.

5.4.1 *'I get to see her and hear her'*: Pairing with people

Customising involves tailoring a shared reading practice to provide a space for an information landscape designed to reconnect children with a person significant to them. Twenty-one[4] of the children who took part in the research had someone (or in many cases more than one person) who was personally known to them reading aloud to them or listening to them read aloud via digital means, often in highly individualised practices. Eleven children had grandmothers, grandfathers, cousins reading to them live via FaceTime or zoom, supporting research findings that video conferencing technology allows children to connect with relatives (Busch, 2018; Gillen *et al.*, 2018). Research also shows that children's digital activities are highly sociable (Davidson, 2009; Daniels *et al.*, 2020) that screen-based media replaced all types of social encounters for weeks at a time during the pandemic (Norrick-Rühl, 2022). This was also the case with these reading activities.

The remaining ten children had family or teachers recording themselves reading stories using smartphones' voice memo or video functions and, in one case, WhatsApp. In one instance a toniebox (see Fig. 1) and in one instance a Yoto player (see Fig 2) were used to listen to stories pre-recorded by extended family (as well as audiobooks). The prevalence of these live and recorded shared reading sessions has also been reported elsewhere (Best, 2021) in relation to parents who were separated from their children, which found that these types of shared digital reading help parents maintain a connection and reading routine with their children.

[4] This figure includes the twenty children who had extended family and teachers reading to them plus KitC who had initially focussed his video data on reading an eBook but at interview described watching videos of his teachers reading to him.

Fig. 16 & 17: A toniebox and a Yoto player

Grandmothers were most commonly present in these shared reading practices featuring in fifteen of the children's reading practices (both recorded and live). However, at interview seven children revealed that grandfathers also read to them via digital means or were present at the reading. Five children discussed reading with or to cousins. Two children had a teacher reading to them in their submitted video data and four others talked about being read to by teachers during semi-structured interviews. Many of the children discussed multiple people from their immediate community reading to them by digital means. The adoption of these people suggests that connection to them mattered in this practice and that the purpose of the practice was to reconnect children with these particular people. This tallies with Baverstock's findings into shared reading which suggest that it 'has additional value when people cannot see each other' (Baverstock *et al.*, 2021 p. 25). Parents' emphasis on the inclusion of these particular people within this practice also suggested that certain ways of knowing are valued within the setting (Lloyd, 2021) and that these people were acting as mentors, guides and models (Callard, 2018; Rothbauer and Cedeira Serantes, 2022) using known ways of reading together which held onto established norms and traditions. Wenger (1998) suggests that experienced members of a community of practice enable new members to engage with the practice and to ensure the maintenance of group culture (p. 74).

Many other family members appeared within these practices in peripheral roles. Children described grandfathers appearing on screen alongside the grandmothers, sometimes

providing an alternative activity from reading. RaeO's grandfather taught him a language and he and the grandfathers of two of the other children played games with them. Some children reported that their parents listened from afar or chatted to the grandparent at the end of the call. Grandfathers, uncles, a step-brother and male cousins also customised these practices by choosing stories they thought children would like and either buying, borrowing or uploading them. Younger siblings were often present on the sidelines, coming to say hello, aware that the activity was taking place but not participating directly.

The involvement of these peripheral figures suggests a community of practice which was currently centring around this child and a member of the extended family but which stretched past these two people as a familiar ongoing practice, which other children in the family took part in or had taken part in when they were children. The importance of the role of extended family, and notably older family members, in reading practices has been highlighted by (Gregory, Long and Volk (2004), Kenner *et al.* (2007), Baverstock (2016), Agosto (2022) and echoes Kuzmičová *et al.*'s (2018) finding that the presence of others, however peripheral, matters in reading practices (p. 70). Yet the presence of extended family and peripheral others, beyond parents and teachers, is generally underrepresented in the extensive literature around children's shared reading practices, digital reading practices and shared digital reading practices.

5.4.2 '*They thought "we could read books online"*': Tailoring technology

Across the data, mothers (or in the case of a same sex couple, the father who was the primary carer) took on the key role in facilitating the provision and use of technology (and reading matter) needed for their children to access the reading activity The findings of Busch (2018) support this, demonstrating that parents, and especially mothers, play a key role in supporting interaction between young children and grandparents using video communication tools. Gender has been identified as playing a role in the free labour which is considered 'women's

work' in digitally social spaces (Johnson, 2021 p. 31) in addition to research which finds that home reading is considered a maternal responsibility (Merga and Roni, 2018 p. 677).

Mothers arranged who the children would read with and when, using text and WhatsApp messages to do this. They sent specific reading matter in advance. They instigated, created, facilitated and uploaded recorded content. They bought, sourced or repurposed any devices needed to facilitate connection. Children often didn't know the specifics of customising, not knowing exactly how the stories had come to be in the digital space, why certain reading matter had been chosen or why certain digital devices had been selected over others. When the researcher asked how co-researchers started reading like this and wondered whose idea it was, they responded:

> Well, um, there's the iPad, the iPad or a phone and you can just record yourself reading the book… or you could use a microphone and you could say into it and it will go into the [tonie]box – FlashM
>
> Researcher: How did you start reading like this with Gran…, whose idea was it?
>
> AriA: I can't 'member.
>
> NovaA: My mums.

Part of customising was defining the parameters of the reading practice by using technology which they determined to be 'fit for purpose' (Lloyd and Wilkinson, 2019 p. 252). Ten of the children who participated were watching, listening or creating recorded content in which they were read a book by a family member or teacher or they themselves were reading the book themselves to their family member.

The creation of these digitally recorded readings supports the idea that people have increasingly become active producers and shapers of media content (Pink *et al.*, 2016). These pieces of user-generated recorded content could be considered texts in their own right: the original aesthetic work, the book, comprising the written words and illustrations combined

with added personalised in media res paratexts (Gray, 2010 p. 40) of the recording comprising: costumes, props, dedications, locations all of which are designed to encapsulate and control elements of the reading which produce a text as a social and cultural unit (Gray, 2010; Brookey and Gray, 2017 p. 102). These new texts encased in and created as digitally material objects: user-generated recordings are made for minute personalised audiences, in which the person reading and the in media res paratexts become bound to the work creating a new text in the form of the recording. In this way the grandparents and teachers are able to incorporate and control the elements of the reading that they consider to be important – those which reference the collective identity of the group – into a distinct material object leaving little to chance in the socially distanced and digital environment.

Although reading-specific technology was employed in some of these pieces of recorded content e.g., the toniebox and Yoto player, more often practices were customised using the technology to hand. For example, one grandmother recorded her made-up story onto What's App and sent it to her grandchildren via their mother's phone. FinnN and her mother used the iPhone voice memo app to record themselves jointly reading *The Gruffalo* (Donaldson and Scheffler, 2009) to her baby cousin and the recording was sent to the baby's father's phone. Both the mothers of AshV and SkyS had photographed the pages of a physical book and sent them digitally to the family members taking part to reflect a way of reading picturebooks which was familiar to the children.

The majority of children were reading illustrated books, but three of the children read text-only fiction with their grandmothers on FaceTime or zoom. The need for visuals in these cases was not obviously necessary in relation to the books. In two instances multiple devices were drafted in to give children specifically chosen perspectives of both the people and the reading matter in the practice. For example, eight-year-old SkyS's teenage cousin, who lived abroad, used a laptop with a digital copy of the book they were reading together. At the same

time, he held his iPhone in his hand, where he could see SkyS, the two devices allowing him to see both the book and his cousin (see Fig. 17). SkyS saw his cousin who was reading to him via an iPad but had a physical copy of the book in front of him (see Fig. 18). In another practice, AshV's grandmother listened to AshV reading on her laptop screen whilst holding her mobile phone to the side. The mobile phone showed her the photographed pages of the physical book he was reading, sent to her digitally via WhatsApp by her daughter-in-law, so she could follow along and correct any mistakes. These configurations suggest that being able to see each other is an essential part of practice and that information is drawn in reading activities from seeing the other person – to facilitate the corporeal modality of information, and as described earlier in this customising section, the importance of seeing not just any person, but particular people.

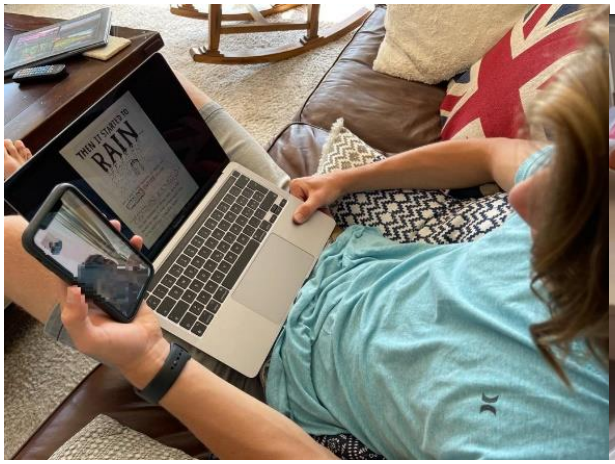


Fig. 18: SkyS's teenage cousin who lived abroad reading to SkyS

Fig. 19: The same reading from SkyS's point of view

Adults, and especially mothers, actively shaped the ways in which children would access and use technology in specific configurations. A form of power relations was at work which certain forms of technology in certain configurations were sanctioned within the information landscape which children accessed. Technology was also customised in relation to the stories which were read and these stories played a crucial part in shaping these shared digital reading practices.

5.4.3. *'Can't just be any random book':* Foregrounding Stories

In addition to customising spaces where people could meet, parents, extended family, teachers and children went to considerable effort to ensure that very specifically chosen and curated reading matter was available either physically, digitally or as a combination of the two. These efforts often involved retrieving, transporting or adapting physical books to insert them into the digital reading practice. This supports Noorda and Inman Berens (2021) finding that family are an important source of reading recommendations (p. 230), and Soulen and Tedrow's (2023) finding that family members and teachers were critical to helping children finding reading matter in the pandemic (p. 3).

Most often physical books, in either hardback or paperback formats, were used in these shared digital reading activities. Sixteen of the children were recorded or discussed using a physical book in some way in their shared digital reading practice. Groups of books were selected or sanctioned by adults and it was from these books that children would make a choice. Other research also supports the finding that parents strongly prefer print books over eBooks and were likely to scaffold their children's use of print books at home (Kucirkova and Littleton, 2016; Kucirkova, 2020; Sun, Loh and Nie, 2021). Books included those within the appropriate book band, certain series of books or collections of books which had been curated by an adult. All of the reading matter discussed was fiction, bar one instance of non-fiction and one instance of a humorous poetry book. As discussed, the use of illustrated fiction and picture books was discussed or recorded by children fifteen times and was used by all but three eight-year-olds in the study who were reading black and white fiction without illustrations. Books included bestsellers and classics like *Harry Potter and The Prisoner of Azkaban* (Rowling, 2014) *; Diary of A Wimpy Kid: The Last Straw* (Kinney, 2014)*; Winnie the Pooh* (Milne, 1981, 2010), *The Enormous Crocodile* (Dahl, 2016) and *The Gruffalo* (Donaldson and Scheffler, 2009). There were also books which addressed particular themes:

Elephant Learns to Share (Graves and Dunton, 2016) and *Ruby's Worries* (Percival, 2018) as well as those which were directly for their age range and reading level: Big Cat readers and *Stories for Eight-Year-Olds* (Cooling, 1996).

However, the most commonly chosen books were books with direct historical links to the families: they were personal not just to the child but to their extended families too and referenced the relationships between family members. Eleven of the children mentioned that at least one, if not all of books which they had read on screen with their family members or which had been recorded were books which their family members, most often grandparents, had kept from when their own children had been young. This correlates with Nolan *et al.*, (2022) and Davies, Lupton and Gormsen Schmidt (2022) who report that people read books which they already owned during the pandemic. It also suggests that within these communities of practice there is a link between certain physical books and intergenerational reading practices. This supports the findings of Kucirkova and Flewitt (2020) who found that parents had a strong sense of nostalgia for the books they were read to as children (p. 15). As the primary customising force, mothers chose activities which involved books which were meaningful to them and their own parents (now the grandparents) into the reading practices of their children, suggesting that these ways of reading were valued.

These old and treasured books were kept in designated places in families' houses or were remembered and purchased again. RobinN2 and FinnN2 had an identical copy of the old poetry book *In and Out the Window* (Dunstan and Dunstan, 1980) that their grandmother read to them from her home on another continent. AliS's grandmother, who lived abroad, kept a set of books from when her daughter, AliS's mother, was young, these included *Pelican* (1982) by Brian Wildsmith, *Mrs Christie's Farmhouse* (1977) by Caroline Browne and *The Sun Egg* (1986) by Elsa Beskow among others. She kept these in a cupboard in the

room that AliS stayed in when he had visited her prior to the pandemic, marking out a place for both nostalgia and their shared activity together within her home.

Researcher: And why has she got the books in the cupboard?

AliS: Well… they were from Mummy.

My dad's her child, from when my dad was at her house. She's got all the books – NovaA

Researcher: 'Why has Grandma already got the Winnie the Pooh books? Where did she get those from?

JoS: From my mummy who was little.

Fig. 20: AliS's grandmother's collection of old children's books kept in her home

Fig. 21: JoS listening to his grandmother reading a 1981 edition of Winnie the Pooh

Reading material was significant not just in terms of chosen physical books but also in the personal and familial connections which it represented. For five children – two sets of siblings - relatives had made up stories in which the children featured as characters along with the grandparents themselves, houses, bikes, pets and other details about the familiar places and people who they weren't able to be with during the lockdown:

> They flew over their school, on over the giant wheel, and on and on following the golden star. Suddenly MoN shouted 'stop! quick stop!' all three looking down they spied the railway bridge that led up to Grandpa and Grandma's farm. 'The star has guided us to [Grandparents farm]!'
>
> – excerpt from a story written for three sisters in May 2020, written and recorded on WhatsApp by their grandmother.

For RobinN2, who was read to via Zoom by his Great Aunt who was dying of cancer, the association with her was created by the books they read together:

> Mum: Did we know [Great Aunt] really well?
>
> RobinN2: Well… I wouldn't… not really… really…
>
> Mum: You didn't know her really well, did you?
>
> RobinN2: …because I hadn't seen her a lot. But I knew what she looked like, and stuff like that.
>
> Mum: Did you enjoy her reading to you?
>
> RobinN2: Yeah. It was really nice. What did she read to us again?
>
> Mum: Do you remember Cuthbert's Babies?
>
> RobinN2: Oh YEAH! [big smile] And the *Little Big*… And the *New Old Truck*! And *The Holiday Bus* – we've got that one!

The relationship between the books and the people who were reading them was key to the reading activity. The chosen books were most commonly not only significant to the child

in question, but to multiple other family members as well, acting as anchors across a web of familial relations. These personal book choices represented a form of 'vernacular literacy' in which the connection to localised information is situated, contingent and drawn from local experience (Lloyd and Wilkinson, 2019 p. 256). This links to findings in the field of bibliotherapy which suggest the benefits of literature which appropriately addresses readers' needs includes being in line with their background and family beliefs (Heath *et al.*, 2005 p. 566, 568). It also links to Information Studies which finds that material with personal relevance is more enthusiastically received by students (Folk, 2021 p.1049). These books and stories provided a version of 'bonding capital' (Putnam, 2000) in which strong links are created to promote trust between people who share, familiar or social ties (amongst others) to the exclusion of others. Or as AshV put it 'can't just be like any random book.' This practice attended to the temporal constructions of the family group acknowledging its past and signifying membership now and into the future (Emirbayer and Mische, 1998 p. 1007-8). This bonding capital (Putnam, 2000) in the form of old books, referenced in-person reading activities which had taken place in these families not only before the pandemic, but also before these children had been born.

It was not just the contents of the books which were heavily influenced by relations between people. The way the practices were set up -- the manipulations of books and technology -- reflected preferences for reading in certain ways. Physical books or elements of them were often adapted, replicated or reflected in the practices. As described, two parent co-researchers took photos of the physical books which they had at home (see Fig 21) and either sent these photos to the relatives by WhatsApp or uploaded them to a shared photo album in the cloud. AliN's grandmother sent him a copy of each physical book in a series when she had finished reading it to him. Physical books were used when children listened to recorded readings. FinnN, who was listening to a recording of her grandfather reading *Winnie the Pooh*

on the Yoto player, when prompted by her mother, reached for a copy of the physical book and settled back to look at it as she listened (see Fig. 22). FinnN's baby cousin was filmed listening to the recording that she sent her, sitting on her dad's knee as he turns the pages of the board book edition of *The Gruffalo* which he has chosen to include when listening to the recording (see Fig. 23) customising the sources of information and way the reading activity unfolded.

As demonstrated above, the majority of the practices were customised via a number of processes to ultimately mimic reading practice featuring a child, an adult and a book and in which there is a personal or meaningful information available to them. The presence of physical books also suggests that their contents, including illustrations, and their material forms are valued parts of the information landscape. Books, as material objects, for these families had a value within the which referenced strong attachments and worked to enact participation within the community of practice (Wenger, 1998; Lloyd, 2010c). This reliance on physical objects also reinforces research findings about how people who are displaced from one another need 'concrete, sensuously perceptible landscapes to feel "at home"' (Rottger-Rossler and Slaby, 2018 p. 14)

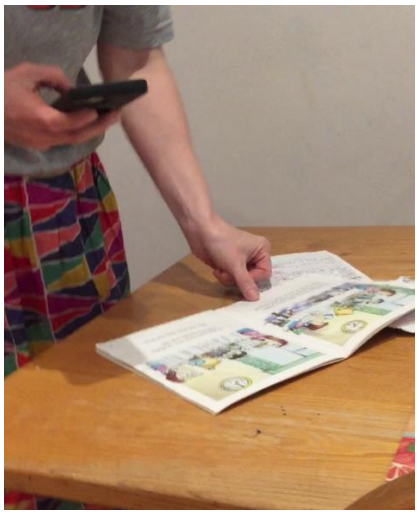


Fig. 22: AshV's mother taking photos of every page in a book to send to Grandma by WhatsApp

Fig. 23: FinnN listening to her grandpa's recorded reading of Winnie the Pooh on the Yoto player and looking at a physical copy of Winnie the Pooh

Fig. 24: FinnN's baby cousin was videoed by her dad listening with him to FinnN and her mum's audio recording of The Gruffalo whilst looking at a physical copy of the book

The significant place of physical books is reflected in how children talked about them. They were often referred to as ‘real’, ‘real-life’ or ‘proper’ by children who also described reading physical books as ‘the way you normally read’ or reading ‘actually as a book.’ This suggests that the communities of practice to which these children belong value and sanction the physical format of books (Wenger, 1998; Lloyd, 2010c p. 10), that aspects of a book’s materiality can contribute to people’s perceptions of its legitimacy (Dietz, 2019) and that information literacy practice, in this case ways of reading, are culturally conditioned (Pilerot and Lindberg, 2011; Folk, 2019, 2021).

> Sometimes she reads the books that she buys on her Kindle, sometimes she buys real books - RaeO

For KimE she made the choice of what to read because after a time reading eBooks, she knew that she owned the physical book:

> Yeah, but my granny gave me options for *Harry Potter* or *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*. I chose *Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* but then I didn’t think it would be so good because I didn’t have a book then. Then I saw *Harry Potter* and I knew I had it. – KimE

Customising these practices, in the way in which the technology was oriented, the people who were sanctioned and the physical books which were foregrounded created a ‘walled garden’ which enabled a digital version of a reading activity which mimicked a familiar shared reading activity.

Customising involved drawing attention to the relations between people, books and ways of reading together in highly personalised and familiar ways. The reading practices included known people who were bodily represented digitally via their voices or their bodies. The recorded content which was made featured the voices and faces of the people who the children longed to be with in person or transported the children’s voices and faces to those

people. Recorded content was made with a person or group of people in mind was a unique offering for them, a gift. The books which were most commonly used had a personal significance to the family or the class and the contexts they were in, and the reading practices were characterised by the highly personal connections which existed. These connections were referenced in the creation of the recording, the story narratives or in the physical books, creating a unique information landscape which enabled meaning-making.

5.5 Navigating

Navigating focusses not just on how people, but also material objects intra-act with one another. It describes how these intra-actions enable or constrain connection to each other, especially in relation to the people and books which have been carefully foregrounded during the customising process. *Navigating* involves understanding how people use their bodies, and how they gain access to material objects, including how they negotiate digital material objects. *Navigating* involves engagement with the texts of the stories themselves, which include illustrations and words either as text or by navigating the meaning of someone's voice and bodily gestures.

Unpacking the category of *navigating* requires examination of the minute interventions which are made quickly and sometimes almost imperceptibly within these practices, made possible via the participatory video data, and considers that how this negotiation happens wields some influence over the practice. Navigating these practices involves negotiating digital and physical spaces, considering the two as indistinct and inseparable from each other.

Eleven of the children in this study had the help of a parent for some or all of the initial navigation process which took them through a series of steps on a device to the digital space in which their person of significance would read to them. At this point the parent would leave the room to return later. This correlates with the findings of Buchholz, Jordan and Frye

(2022) whose study of an author's virtual visit to the school during the pandemic found that adults were necessary 'facilitators' (p. 286).

Nine children were able to begin the navigation process independently and this depended on the child's age and disposition and the way in which the practice had been customised for them. Children's navigating abilities were not fixed. As this section will show arrays of navigational elements and children's ability to navigate them varied from activity to activity. Children who reported struggling with some navigational elements also talked about the ease of using others. There were instances where children who reported easily navigating the digital devices were captured on camera struggling with that activity in the moment. *Navigating* is situated and contingent and the examples given here are ones which were represented in the data and when synthesised together form a pattern, but a different set of practices might throw up a different set of localised and conditional navigational manoeuvres. These findings support the notion that information literacy practices are situated and contingent, and are therefore something which is learned in practice (Tuominen, Savolainen and Talja, 2005; Lloyd, 2017) via the processes and actions of different situations, no matter how minute those differences might be.

5.5.1 *'Poor connection'*

The most disruptive element of these practices was when digital devices led to the total shut down of the activity. The two most commonly cited problems, discussed by eight children, were running out of battery and the Wi-Fi dropping out or 'poor connection' as the children called it. The permanent breakdown of devices was also mentioned. There were also instances where it was a person who shut down the practice: one child described falling asleep, another simply walked away during a scary story. This left the family member on the other side of the screen powerless to communicate with them or persuade them to return. Seven children talked about or experienced pets, younger siblings and parents interrupting

around the margins of the practice, sometimes in a way which derailed the reading for some time and sometimes as a minor irritation which was akin to a low-level buzz in the background. AshV and AliN's grandfathers provided them with welcome distractions joining in the reading but never actually doing any reading. These findings are supported by Chen and Adams (2022) findings that children would get up and leave during remote instruction in their study on teachers' strategies on scaffolding children's social and emotional wellbeing during the pandemic (p. 931), and also Buchholz, Jordan and Frye's (2022) study of a remote author visit in which the author's dog became a major source of interest to the children (p. 293). The interruptions of these everyday and domestic kinds are essential to recognise because it lends credibility to the claim that information literacy is a sociocultural practice and does not take place in a vacuum. It demonstrates how carefully customised practices did not always play out as adults intended.

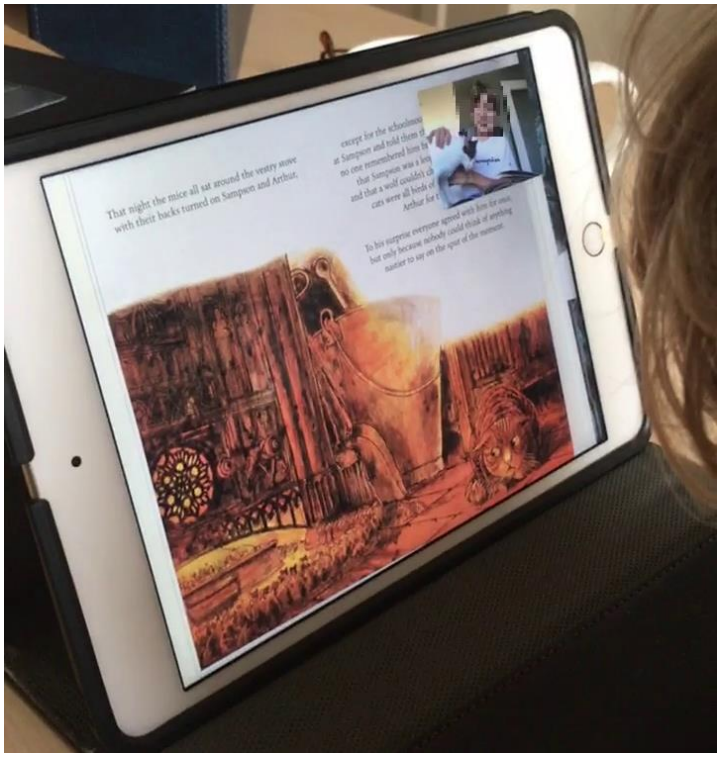


Fig. 25: SkyS's cousin's pet cat, seen in the top right-hand box on screen, interrupts the reading

In the practices studied in this research there were frequent breaks in children's access to the story as digital elements intervened during the reading practice. In these practices arrays of digital information which presented themselves to children offered up numerous alternative choices, created minor distractions or partially obscured their access to the text.

Alternative options presented themselves as digitally mediated pieces of information at the opening stages of children's navigation process. Seven children talked about navigating contacts lists and calling functions on Zoom and Facetime and four discussed app logos like YouTube or Netflix signalling and offering alternative content; one talked about scrolling through Google Classroom posts and one about banging the sides of the toniebox repeatedly to find the story she was looking for.

> You might find Minecraft, you might find phone calls, you might find Safari, you might find apps, you might find Netflix – JoS
>
> Because it [the iPad]'s got Doodle Maths, Timestable Rockstars, the app store. And You Tube, lucky me! – SkyS

These options presented alternatives which deviated from the customised path set by the adults, who had worked to present an information landscape to children which was sanctioned and designed to bring certain people and selected content together. This suggests a tension between the customised information landscape of the adults and the navigational realities of it and what information sources the children notice within it.

Children learnt to navigate through interfaces, many of which were new to them or had become increasingly familiar since the pandemic began. In the case of the recorded content, which this study argues are texts in their own right, the digital interfaces which allow the reader to enter these texts become a form of hyperparatextuality: 'the distributed state of immersive reading in digitized and read-in-browser environments' (Barnett, 2020, p. 43) where these situated and contingent environments impact on the reader's reception. This

supports the findings of Haider and Sundin (2022) which suggest that it is useful to understand the conditions of information as well as understanding information and information sources themselves. This digitally mediated information, often in the form of navigational icons and instructions, in these instances acted as a navigational paratexts framing the text, although these elements were not a permanent fixture. These elements were similar to the 'Netflix recommends' icons discussed by Skare (2020 p. 514) or the search engine results which VanDijk (2014) references in her poststructuralist study of distributor-created paratexts which referenced search engine results which 'cluster around the text and become part if it even if there is no authorial consent' (p. 40). Naming these 'digital dynamic paratexts' (2014, p. 40) she, argued that these influenced how the text shaped meaning for the user. In this study children learnt over time, and sometimes after making mistakes, how to negotiate this digital dynamic paratextual information which controlled their entrance to the text steering them towards action and which took the form of text but also icons, recorded voices, beeps and preview panes:

> Because if I didn't press that, and if I pressed another, it would change the class name… and I would go to [another class name] – WynnN

StarE described how the toniebox alerted her and her sister when it was about to stop working because it needed to be charged:

> Also, when it doesn't work and somebody said 'I need to go in a charging station' - StarE

WynnS, watching a YouTube recording of her teacher reading a picture book, finds that the YouTube preview pane is obscuring the illustrations of the book. Ten of the children in this study described or showed how they knew what was happening in the books because of the illustrations. When illustrations are obscured by navigational information generated by a digital interface (in this case the YouTube preview pane which allows navigation to places

within the video recording), this information is acting as a navigational paratext (Birke and Christ, 2013 p. 68) around the recorded content. In WynnS's case it removes part of the text: the illustrations. Picture books are a medium which requires decoding of both text and illustration and how they work synergistically (Nodelman, 1989; Nikolajeva and Scott, 2006). Thus, WynnS loses an element of understanding when the illustrations are hidden, the connection between the words spoken by her teacher and the relevant illustrations are lost.

The array of minute interventions, requests and pieces of information offered up alternative pathways through or directed children away from or towards the text. This hyperparatextuality, sometimes created distractions or obscured access to the text. All are reminiscent of Genette's declaration that 'from the fact that a paratext always fulfils a function, it does not necessarily follow that the paratext always fulfils its function well' (Genette, 1997, p. 409).

Exacerbating this issue was the contingent nature of these pieces of information. In the case of the obscuring YouTube timeline, WynnS employs her embodied expertise (Lloyd, 2012) and tries to remove the preview pane by tapping on the screen (as she would on a tablet or phone) (see Fig. 25) only to find that tapping does not work. She is watching the recording on her mother's laptop and tapping the screen is not an action that this device understands. The YouTube preview pane remained on the screen.

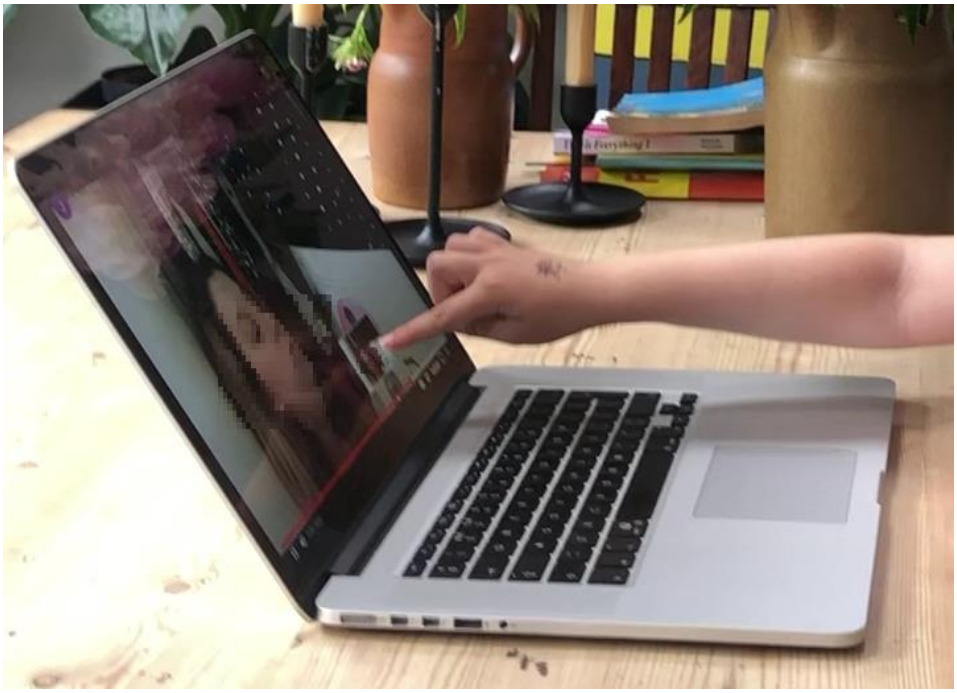


Fig. 26: WynnS listening to a recording made to by her teacher and tapping the YouTube preview pane which is obscuring the book's illustrations to try to make it disappear

Children also encountered unwanted surprises as interfaces and devices reacted to their accidental haptic cues. For SkyS on two occasions in his video, the photographs of the book page (which his mother photographed) disappeared at the slightest touch of the screen, returning to the thumbnails of all of the photographed pages of the book on the iPhoto album. As this happened, his cousin continued to read unaware of the disconnect on the other side of the screen, meaning that SkyS momentarily lost his place in the narrative.

There was confusion in communicating with others when navigating across digital spaces. There were times where the available information sources were not visible or comprehensible to the children. WynnN answers his teacher's rhetorical question out loud, not understanding at that moment that he is watching a recording. RobinN2 and FinnN2, who had no page numbers in their book, found they couldn't angle the book towards the camera effectively to allow their grandmother to see their chosen page and instead resorted to lengthy

explanations about which poem they wanted to read. For KimE confusion around the digital interface provoked an emotional reaction. Being unable to navigate the information presented to her on the FaceTime address book on one occasion, she described accidently instigating a joint FaceTime call with both grandmothers instead of just one:

KimE: I accidentally went on to the joint FaceTime call with my granny and my gran [whispers] which did not go well… It says I'm joined.

Researcher: Oh no, how did you feel when that happened?

KimE: Guilty.

Navigating requires the ability to use information tools, which includes understanding how they function (Lloyd, 2021). The hyperparatextual information landscape was not always understood by children in the moment of that activity or had to be learnt over time. This understanding was one which required their thought, not in words but in their bodily movements (Lloyd, 2012). O'Loughlin (1998) suggests that bodies become storehouses of information and for these children the storehouse of information required to navigate certain interfaces was in some instances a work in progress. Or what had worked when using one device or interface did not work in a different configuration or at a different time. There where instances when this threw up a barrier to children creating connections with both the stories and the people from their immediate communities who had been so carefully recruited to the practice by their parents. These were tiny but key pieces of information, which, echoing Bateson (1972 p. 459) made a difference to how the children experienced the practices because as Barnett explains they 'impose or cohere practices, habits, tendencies of interaction' (Barnett, 2020 p. 47). In terms of information literacy, they can be considered as epistemic modalities of information: they express 'rules and regulations and discourses that legitimise practice' (Lloyd, 2021, p. 4). Epistemic modalities of information 'reference the normative aspects (rules, regulations) that are necessary to operate in society and everyday

life' (Lloyd, 2017 p. 95) in this case operating a digital device. These digital dynamic paratexts in hyperparatextual environments were not always represented textually and, in some circumstances, shifted and changed with each reading depending on the device or interface which is used. This tallies with the findings of Cox, McKinney and Goodale (2017) whose findings suggest that epistemic modalities of information, although originally conceived of as text based, are not always so in digital environments (p. 184). This finding also lends credence to a conception of information literacy as a sociocultural practice which is learnt in situated and contingent conditions.

5.5.2 *'I just use, like, my iPad'* Facilitating connection

However, there were many instances in which digital devices and interfaces and other material objects provided children with connection to the stories and to others. Seven of the children reported navigating digital devices with ease. They were often, but not always, the older children in this study. Children who were using devices which had been designed for children's use -- the toniebox and Yoto player -- had also learnt to respond to the digital and materially mediated cues. For FinnN, who was using a Yoto player, the simplicity of the epistemic information presented by the device meant that she could access a reading by her grandfather unshackled: 'You put the cards in and then you don't do anything, you just listen.' However, even these devices which had been designed for children had their own inconsistencies and discrepancies which children had learnt to navigate over time, a form of learning through practice. FlashM described how she had learnt to adjust the volume on the toniebox for a particularly quiet story by using the triangles on the top of the box (see Fig. 15)– one larger than the other:

> Yeah, and we have to make this one [audio recorded story] really loud because it's a little bit really quiet, so you have to make it really loud - FlashM

She also explained how she physically hit the box and could recognise that the beep sound announced a new story:

> So, you just hit them … until you see a beep sound - FlashM

When children could navigate the meanings presented to them in hyperparatextual environments, they were not only a source of information which facilitated connection, but they also contributed to a greater degree of power for the children in the practice, in the form of participation, independence and choice in the practice, creating navigational affordances for the user (Birke and Christ, 2013, p. 68). This was corporeally mediated information which worked in tandem with visual cues relating to colours or shapes. Those using the toniebox or Yoto player explained how they easily selected the story they wanted using the figurines based on a character or cards which activated the screen on the front of the box with an image relating to the chosen story (see Fig. 15 and 16), these figurines and cards effectively acting as entryway paratexts (Gray, 2010 p. 35) akin to a book cover, designed with children in mind and facilitating their easy access.

Being able to read text, swipe, zoom and scroll effectively with their fingers and react to visual cues, certain colours, noises or recorded instructions meant that children could navigate content, select what they were looking for independent of their parents. This finding tallies with scholarly work on young children's digital reading which emphasises the role of colours and sign systems (Rowsell, 2014 p. 122) as well as lines, textures and shapes (Lopatovska *et al.*, 2018 p. 588) and the use of touch (Mangen, 2010 p. 419). Eight-year-old RaeO described from memory navigating through Zoom to get to his Grandparents, so his grandmother could read to him:

> So basically, it's really easy to get on. All you have to do… if your name's there, you can just press, um, you can just press OK. Then um, you have to, you type in the username, who you're going to zoom, or sometimes if you have all the accounts

you've zoomed, you can just press this little arrow pointing down and it… all the usernames come up. [Later] So, err, it says Grandad and then there's these numbers. Then you press the right one, then you press join and then you have to do your password, then press OK and then you log on. Sometimes you might… it might be muted, you're muted, you can't hear them, so you have to press the unmute button. – RaeO

Fig. 27: RaeO reading on zoom with his grandmother

RaeO use of the words 'if', 'sometimes' and 'might' again highlights the contingent nature of these digitally mediated information literacy practices, where learning to navigate them is a matter of understanding in practice rather than a fixed set of steps which form the rules to follow.

The peritexts of physical books which were visible on screen or referred to in audio recordings facilitated communication between parties. For AshV reading a book with a certain band of colour displayed on the spine, indicated his literacy achievements to his grandmother. AliS was able to check the cover of his grandmother's chosen book to be sure that that was the one he wanted. Video data shows seven adults used the book's peritexts to

lead children into the reading, signposting themes and characters using the book's covers, illustrations chapters and titles, which tallies with practitioner findings about how paratexts facilitate understanding in young children (Lambert, 2010; Coifman, 2013). The peritexts of physical books provided a form of information which was a familiar element of in-person shared reading and served to guide the reader and listener in how to act and engage with one another. Peritexts contributed to the way in which information literacy unfolded. They were used to signal the beginning of the reading as a significant event, where care and attention to detail was needed but which also introduced the promise and interest of the book itself. Children were asked to make guesses about the book based on the covers, and were introduced to the authors and illustrators. Research shows that prompting discussion, questions and engagement plays a critical role in facilitating children's literacy and reading enjoyment (Best, 2021; Stoetzel and Shedrow, 2021; Buchholz, Jordan and Frye, 2022). In this study peritexts facilitated the information literacy practice, shaping it as a shared experience where meaning was made between children and their extended family and teachers. Navigating peritexts together prompted discussions, questions and engagement between parties and in relation to the narrative work. Peritexts in this context served as a social modality of information. This refers to 'the nuanced types of information that are formed around the often unwritten norms or conventions of practice and/or social exchange' (Lloyd, 2017a p. 95) which in this case refer to the conventions of reading a book together with a child in a UK setting. Relatedly, peritexts also played a part in people's information literacy in relation to shared reading, as they provided an anchor around which people could enact their embodied knowledge of how to read a book together. Peritexts were used to create physical engagement with one another, for example, smiling or nodding at one another at an aspect of a cover illustration or a chosen title, demonstrating this kind of reading to be mutually understood as collective and emotionally driven. The peritexts of physical books

enabled the information literacy practice, suggesting that paratexts including peritexts played a role in enacting information literacy practice in this study.

The material properties of physical books also facilitated communication between people. Most obviously this came in the form of illustrations which complimented the narrative and were easy to decipher.

> I'm going to hold up the picture because you can see there's a tree there. [Grandmother's finger appears pointing to the tree.] – AliS' Grandmother
>
> Researcher: And do you see [Grandma's] face when she's reading?
>
> NovaA: No, I see the pictures of the book.
>
> They are books with pictures and when there's a page with a picture on, she makes it turn around and I get to see the picture. – JoS

Pages also mattered. AshV and AliN metered out how much they could read by the number of pages, a certain number designating triumph. For these two boys, and WynnN, pages mediated equality where a child and a significant person took turns to read a page each: 'I read a page, he reads a page.' For RobinN2 and FinnN2 possession of the book which lay between them dictated who would choose the next poem, RobinN2 ultimately triumphing by physically pinning the page he wanted down with his finger. For the siblings, pages were designated by the grandmother especially for FinnN2, the younger sibling, to join in with. And pages were used to beg for more – 'just one more page, just half a page…' (AliN). The reference to or use of pages granted the children some control over the reading practice allowing them to put their point of view across or to negotiate their interests.

Material objects, particularly digital devices coupled with other objects, amplified the narrative of the story allowing children to access story. Children found themselves engaging with user-generated recordings, texts which were read by their extended family and teachers who had also framed and imbued these texts with paratextual elements to highlight the

imaginary, personal, unusual or playful and challenged expectations of normality and reality. They might be met by grown-ups who were dressed up as characters from the story in the case of WynnN, AriA and NovaA. They might find an adult who was residing in a bath or a wardrobe or showing them the view from their window across the rooftops (see Fig. 28) (for reasons which were explained in the recorded text) in the case of KitC, WynnS and WynnN. For KitN and FinnN they embarked on turning one of their books into a play, with their parents' participation, creating many and varied props from their usually mundane household items including bags of raisins and balls (see Fig. 29). Recordings and videos opened with personalised dedications to the intended recipients or explanations about why the reader had chosen that work in relation to themselves or the intended recipients. It was information which told the receiver about the spirit in which this text was made and how they should receive it – not as an educational practice, but as a playful one. These forms of information also signalled that the recordings had been made with the children in mind and to suit them personally. These recordings captured the elements which the reader wanted to communicate to the listener by wrapping them into one recorded package, which went some way to ensuring the reception of the text by exerting control over its creation.

Teacher: I do like that story and I do like talking about my worries…

Fig. 28: Teacher dressed as the character from the book she's about to read in a recording made for World Book Day, March 2021

Fig. 29: KitN and FinnN's play of the book 'Elephant Learns to Share' filmed with a toy Panda (because they didn't' have an Elephant toy) for their baby cousin during the lockdown of Christmas 2020

The narrative of the story was also amplified by recordings or live readings where extended family or teachers were bodily present: audible and visible. For children, these bodily additions brought meaning to the story:

> Um, so when something funny is happening she does a really high voice and when something dangerous is happening she does a really low voice - JoS

Video data reveals how children bodily react to the sound of the voices (also part of a body) of the people reading to them. Reacting to the narrative and its meaning, ten of the children (or groups of siblings) exchange glances between each other or with the person reading, look scared, happy or content, they made gestures which matched the story and occasionally gasp or interject themselves. Sharing the reading performance these children also joined in with words they know are coming. In this way people's bodies were navigated as producers of information understood by children and their immediate communities. When FinnN2 was not able to keep up with the poem his brother and grandmother could read, he hummed along rhythmically instead, signalling his legitimate peripheral participation as part of the community of practice (Lave and Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998). This bodily contribution was accepted by his brother and grandmother who continued to read in unison as he hummed along keeping rhythm with their words. For AshV, AliS, RobinN2, FinnN2, WynnN, WynnS, the adults who were reading created a game out of reading aloud, leaving a gap or asking a question, knowing that the child is familiar enough with the story to fill in the blank themselves, to their and their adult's obvious pleasure. When the child was doing the reading, such as AshV, KimE, RobinN2, the adult too reacts with expressions which closely relate to the story in hand – pleasure, disgust, disapproval or laughter.

For the children in this study the ability to navigate to and through the texts of the chosen stories and relations with their extended family and teachers, including how they interpret the text, relied on an embodied understanding of the movements and expressions of

others. Devices facilitated this at a time of boundedness through of bodily separation. The book and the device represent the potential of the story but they only exist in the act of being read, and in navigating these activities ‘seeing often depend[ed] on the seeing of others’ (Felski, 2020 p. 16).

These reading activities involved a complex navigation process which required the enactment of epistemic, corporeal and social modalities of information (Lloyd, 2010c) and took place in situated and contingent circumstances. Material objects contributed information which changed the ways in which these practices were carried out through subtle agentic performances. This could be disruptive and troublesome, obscuring content and the pathways to it, peeling the practice away from its carefully customised purpose. At other times the agentic performances made by material objects served to bring people closer to one another, moulding them tightly to the activity, objects and each other. The findings of this navigating section corroborate the sociocultural stance towards information literacy showing how navigating information landscapes are not fixed but rather something which is learned in practice. In addition, this section on navigating shows that information literacy plays an essential part in how children engage with reading activities. It does this by demonstrating how children drew upon other people and across a wide range of literacies rather than just selected forms (for example, digital literacy or visual literacy). These reading practices drew on corporeal, epistemic and social forms of information literacy.

5.6 Belonging

Belonging describes the state of comfort, intimacy and community relating to strong attachments to people and things. *Belonging*, by its nature relates to someone or something else and these states of belonging were shared and social ones. *Belonging* corresponds to longing: in that it gives access (although not necessarily entirely) to both the longed-for immediate community and to a liberating and enriching space at a time of boundedness

imposed by external authorities. The reading activities described in this study provided a space through which an information landscape could be accessed, a landscape which was populated by multiple forms of affective information and referenced socially and historically understood ways of reading together. This information engendered a sense of belonging by creating shared experiences or referencing past experiences and creating opportunities to foster and further build relationships reinforcing children's identity, in particular as a valued and understood member of a group. *Belonging* involves accessing sources of information which enable people to access a fictional space together where they can share experiences together. *Belonging* facilitates children's understanding that they are the known object of care and love and results in feelings of happiness and relaxation maintaining wellbeing at a time of isolation.

5.6.1. *'It feels like he was there or we weren't there'*: Mimicking practices

As discussed previously in this chapter, the ways in which these shared reading activities were customised bore a strong resemblance to families' reported ways of reading together in person, reflecting an established way of knowing relating to sharing a book together which has been socially and historically shaped. There were some instances in which the adaption of the information landscape of the known in-person shared reading failed to translate into the socially distanced version of itself. Elements which might have happened in-person did not work, especially the elements of play which happened around the edges of shared reading practices. AshV and AliN described trying to replicate physical play: hitting the iPad with a pillow; trying to hide by using the camera flip function on an iPad, and a grandfather pretending to take off the child's nose across the screen. But there was a sense that these games were lacking. WynnS described how the children of her class listening to the teacher couldn't vote for the book to be read as they would at school because online, they were all on

mute. Rae O described the lingering sense of longing through these practices which tried to engender belonging:

> You’re not allowed to touch each other, it’s just the screen there – RaeO

However, there were elements of the practice which did translate online. Analysis of the video data reveals children’s corporeal responses to information which created conditions which signalled relaxation, closeness and playfulness demonstrating children’s information literacy practice through their bodily movements. For AliN, AliS, FinnN, KimE, JoS and RaeO the customised information had created a familiar environment which they understood to be for connection and comfort rather than education. These children are curled around their digital device or lay on their tummies on a sofa or bed wearing pyjamas, with toys. Siblings showed a connection to each other: AriA and NovaA nestled close together around the screen, RobinN2 and FinnN2 hugged each other; RobinN, MoN and SkyN exchange looks with one another during key moments of the story, as did sisters FlashM and StarE. FinnN2 puts his thumb in his mouth and begins to pull at his ear as he listens to his grandma reading. FinnN begins to fall asleep, as the Yoto player rested at the head of her bed, the sound of her grandfather’s voice coming from the same place it would if he was actually physically sitting on the bed to read her a story.

Children whose information landscapes had been customised to reference more educational reading activities, structured around learning to read or engaging in the practice as part of their remote schooling, sat with a focussed air of concentration. Children demonstrated their information literacy by bodily enacting these mutually understood shared reading practices, demonstrating a way of knowing how to act. WynnS has her arms crossed over their chest as she might do sitting on the carpet for storytime at school or WynnN and SkyS sat forwards intently with their hands on their foreheads. All of this served to bodily

reinforce children's identities as members of a class or family but also referenced their life and ways of doing things before the pandemic.

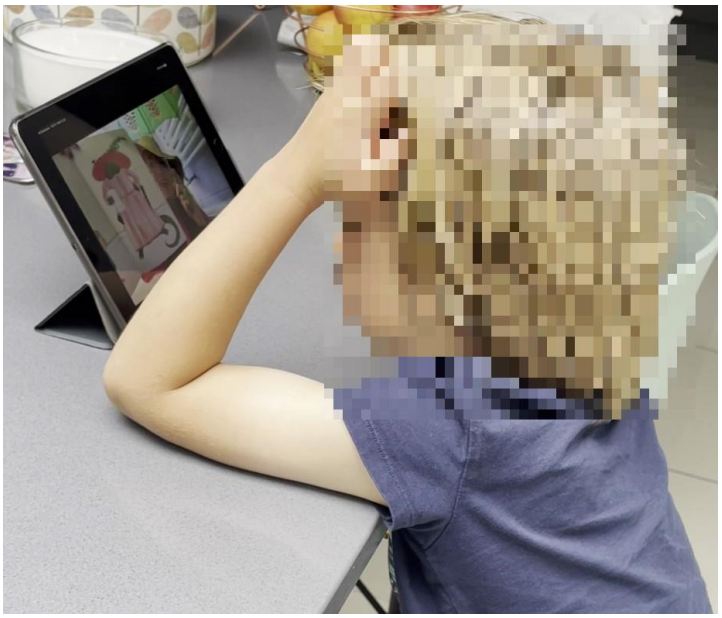


Fig. 30: WynnS concentrating as he is read to by a teacher via a Google Classroom recording

As well as a sense of intimacy, focus, familiarity and comfort, children and their significant others shared their emotions and feelings with one another. Eleven children and their known adults talked about the story and the characters; this conversation included how the story and characters made them feel, who their favourites were, what they aspired to, connecting narratives to real world situations and people, other stories, places they had been together, and related them to jokes within the family. AshV's grandmother corrects him when he compares his younger brother unfavourably to a character in the book they are reading. In some instances, adults encouraged, or corrected children or referenced educational elements of reading. However, more frequently children and adults talked about their emotions, including how they felt about the stories and the characters they encountered and making connections with their own lives.

Laughing and smiling with others was the most prevalent emotion on show, and tied into the choice of books, the majority of which had humorous elements. Ten of the children

were captured on film smiling or laughing during the reading. Laughing at a character's name, the punchline of a joke, the denouement of a story, all were reported by children at interview. As discussed in the chapter on research design the private nature of these practices was not always easy to capture on film. Inhabiting a story is a spontaneous and intimate act where interruptions (including research processes) break that flow of feeling easily.

In many of the practices extended family or teachers made approving or disapproving noises, signalling not just their feelings about the narrative but also signalling their presence to the person reading. KimE's grandmother, who is listening to her read, makes 'ooh's and 'ahh's and other seemingly insignificant noises throughout KimE's reading. This served a purpose, showing KimE that she is there, present, engaged and listening to KimE's endeavour. Children and their extended family and teachers also used their faces and bodies, often in exaggerated forms, to communicate with one another during the reading. AshV and his grandmother nod effusively at each other, AliS mouths the words of his grandmother's story, smiles at significant moments. Both he and KimE use their eyebrows to question fantastical elements of their stories and FinnN opens her mouth as she reacts to a surprising turn in her story. Busch (2018) reports how the visual capacity of technology allows children the opportunity for expression through gesture and gaze and to express their ideas (p. 17 – 18). Using bodily expressions in this way to create moments of common reference of connection in relation to a story, according to Shotter (2009), creates a shared rooting between actors within activities. In this way the children and their families corporeally enacted their information literacy, demonstrating their intersubjective understandings of the story narrative. This demonstrates how the inclusion of visual reference points facilitated by video calling apps like Zoom and FaceTime was necessary even when the texts being read did not include visual references. People's bodies enabled their information literacy practice and it was through their bodies that meaning was made.

5.6.2 *'We had gone somewhere'*: Co-habiting

It was within these secure, intimate and unshackled states which these children accessed the narrative of the story. As children began to listen to the story an initial physical change took place. Fourteen of the children, who had been moving before the story began, became very still with all or almost total movement ceasing as the story began. They also got a 'far away' look in their eyes as they were transported into the story's narrative. For AliS and NovaA a toy and a pen are momentarily laid aside. Stillness and intently looking at the screen or into middle distance characterise the absorption of emerging into a narrative space. This absorption has been described as a state of semi-detachment by Plotz (2017) , of inhabiting both the world of an artwork and the world in which the artwork exists. In the case of this study, this semi-detached state in which the children find themselves was coded as the 'co-habiting' in which children and their significant others both occupy both the narrative space and outside it, intra-acting with one another on both levels.

The described initial stillness was broken as children, their siblings and their extended family and teachers engaged in shared reactions to the narrative: smiling encouragingly or conspiratorially; moving back or wriggling in your chair with pleasure at a punchline; collectively getting the giggles or simply sharing a glance during a significant point in the story.

Moving seamlessly between the real and imaginary worlds was also characterised by how fictional characters were included into their descriptions of the practice itself: they were not separate entities but rather were reported as present in the practice.

> NovaA: Because [the crocodile] said it was going to eat a child.
>
> Researcher: Oh no!
>
> NovaA: But not us, because it's only in a story and it was in Africa and wasn't in England.

Researcher: What are the best bits about reading with her [Grandma]?

AliN: All of it… except the Dursleys.

RobinN2 and FinnN2, who were separated from their dad on the other side of the world through the first lockdown, added their own elements into their dad's made-up stories of two mischievous boys, who were based on them. He told them these stories each night on zoom when he stopped working around midnight and as they were eating their lunch in a different time zone:

Well Wilbur uses something called the Poopy Pants Ejector… which I made up, it's a hat… which has buttons… where poopy pants come out: Poopy… Pants… Are… COMING… OOOUT! – RobinN2

Sisters SkyN, MoN and RobinN gasped with happiness as their grandmother's story mentioned the grandparent's dog, reportedly loved and much missed by the sisters. The insertion of elements of children's real worlds into stories facilitates the extension of both those everyday and imaginary worlds of children (Heath, 2009) and here the inclusion of the everyday after a period of separation was greeted with pleasure. After the initial stillness, RobinN begins to act out her grandmothers recorded story – spreading her arms out wide as it describes her flying away from home, and towards her grandparents' farm, on an enchanted scooter. Her sister MoN reported:

'I even got to touch a star'

and SkyN explained:

'We had gone somewhere. And it was very adventurous and I loved it.'

Fig. 31: MoN, RobinN and SkyN laughing at their grandmothers' references to their parents in her made-up story in which the family feature as characters

Co-habiting is a temporary reprieve from longing, which for these children in these circumstances was characterised by isolation and the absence of connection to their immediate communities during the lockdowns and social distancing. Unable to physically go anywhere, narrative provided a place to travel and inhabit fictional worlds, meeting compelling characters and adventuring in faraway places which pushed the boundaries and norms of their everyday lives. Transporting them out of their own homes into new and unexpected or different situations, these stories took them far from the new normal of the virus and social distancing. In this way the information literacy practice enabled a shared experience and a collective endeavour for the children and their immediate community to take part in, engendering a sense of belonging to their valued community.

5.6.3 *'Happy'*

Despite the lingering sense of longing within these practices, overall, the children reported feeling 'happy', 'relaxed', and 'comfortable'. First and foremost, it was the intra-actions with their extended family and teachers which made them happy. And this happiness

was shared, as children reported the practices also made those in their immediate community happy too. For children who were reading live with grandparents where the grandparents' faces were visible in the video data, the grandparents' looks of adoration and interest in their grandchildren were clearly evident:

Researcher: Why do you think [your Grandparents] enjoy [reading in this way]?

KimE: Because they are mostly always smiling in it.

Children took these shared digital reading practices as an indicator that their important people loved and cared about them and actively wanted them to be happy.

Researcher: How does Grandma feel about reading like this?

JoS: Happy

Researcher: And why is she happy?

JoS: Because she gets to see her grandchildren.

She made it up because she wanted, um, no well, she wanted to put it and make a story so we could listen to it, and make us feel a bit happy and think about her a lot – MoN

Children reported that being with their important person, seeing them or hearing them was the best thing about the practice. This was not because of specific attributes or qualities but rather it was their connection to each other in and of itself was the reason why being with them was so special.

Researcher: How do you feel when somebody is reading to you?

WynnS: Happy.

Researcher: Happy. What is it that makes you happy about it?

WynnS: That I get to see her.

Researcher: Why do you like to see [teacher's name]

WynnS: Because she is my teacher.

Researcher: What do you like about it?

AliS: That I get to see her and hear her.

Researcher: And what else? What else is good about it?

AliS: Well, it's just… there's nothing really else, that's what's good about it.

At a time of loss, shared digital reading practices brought children a strong sense of belonging to a fictional community, breaking away from their everyday lives and entering a different kind of reality (Felski, 2020). Twinned with this was the strong sense of belonging with their extended family and teachers whose care for them was strongly evident in many of their bodily movements, utterances and actions. Children reported and showed themselves to be relaxed, diverted, enchanted and above all happy within these communities of practice. This finding correlates with the body of literature which suggests that reading for pleasure is a source of enjoyment, relaxation and an escape from boredom (Sun *et al.*, 2021) and that this was the case during the pandemic lockdowns (Clark and Picton, 2020 p. 6, 12).

Merga (2021) found that reading helped young people to escape from sources of stress (p. 672). Clark and Teravainen-Goff (2020) found links between the reading practices of children over nine-years-old and their mental wellbeing. Baverstock's study on veterans in prison reading remotely to their children found that sharing books and talking about them made memorable and deep experiences which improved families' connectivity and benefitted their mental and emotional wellbeing. Schmeer *et al.* (2021) found that the maintenance of family routines was associated with better mental health (p. 3) and Snelling (2021) suggests that listening to books was used during the pandemic as a self-soothing exercise (p. 653). The findings of this study support this body of work, suggesting that the children in this study found happiness, relaxation, connection and comfort from connecting with people who mattered to them through engaging with reading material which was meaningful to them and those reading with them, emphasising the role of reading in people's wellbeing. In a

pandemic context these shared reading practices fulfilled the function of ‘reconstructing close familial bonds’ (Mutch and Romero, 2022 p. 94) particularly during a crisis, a time when people ‘feel a renewed desire for bonding [which] generates and reinvigorates the desire for community’ (Di Napoli *et al.*, 2021 p. 2).

5.7 Binding Together

This chapter opened with an explanation of the theory of *binding together.* In this section, this central category: *binding together*, is unpacked and explored more fully to explicate how each of the categories explored in this chapter: longing; customising, navigating and belonging feed into this central category.

Connecting children and their immediate communities and driving the construction of their information literacy practice, their information activities are drawn together through the overarching theme of *binding together* as illustrated by Figure 14. *Binding together* refers to parents, primarily mothers, attempts to keep connection between children and their immediate communities and to secure their wellbeing during a period of enforced isolation. This was carried out by creating shared reading activities in digital settings. *Binding together* is constituted through: the recognition of children’s longing for their immediate communities; customising of shared reading activities to reflect shared reading norms and traditions; children, their extended families and teachers learning to navigate these customised activities together; in turn affording them the opportunity to reinforce a sense of belonging to their longed-for group, binding them together at a time of separation.

Recognising the isolation produced through the lockdowns and social distancing measures of the Covid-19 pandemic and the inaccessibility of children’s immediate communities, parents were driven to customise shared reading activities online to facilitate children’s connection to their immediate communities and their wellbeing. Shaped by a desire

to assuage loneliness, boredom and anxiety, *binding together* highlights how children's engagement with these shared reading activities was structured through parents' goal of ensuring connection between people. By highlighting the broad range of information sources and activities in which parents, children and their immediate communities engaged in, through these shared reading activities, *binding together* also demonstrates the complexity of building and navigating information landscapes. In addition, *binding together* evidences how people's engagement with information is influenced by the context and situation which they find themselves in.

During the Covid-19 pandemic contact between children and their immediate communities became severely limited. In addition, the enforced isolation of the pandemic meant that children experienced feelings of loneliness, anxiety and boredom. In order to reconnect children to people they cared about via an activity which enabled contact and interaction, parents, mostly mothers, instigated the customisation of shared reading activities in online settings which children and their immediate communities also helped to shape. Although adults played the dominant role in customising these activities, children did take part in creating information by reading and acting out stories for recordings, sourcing and making props, as well as reading aloud via FaceTime and Zoom to others.

These digitally mediated activities were customised to reference known in-person shared reading activities as experienced by children, like reading as a class or sharing a bedtime story. In this way the customisation of reading activities guided children and others as they navigated their new digital setting: binding together their past experiences to new ones and guiding their understanding and expectations for the shared reading activity in the digital environment. KitC describes how his teachers came up with the recorded storytime videos which they uploaded for their classes during the pandemic.

‘So, then they thought “hmm, how could we *carry on* doing story time?”‘ – KitC [my italics]

This draws attention to these activities as a continuation of past and mutually understood ways of reading together, binding children to known norms and traditions and directing them and their immediate communities as to how these activities should be carried out, drawing attention to the role of social and corporeal information in new settings. By setting up reading activities to mirror in-person reading practices, parents made use of social, tacit and affective information to signal what these shared reading activities comprised of both practically and emotionally, whether they were understood as educational or relaxing pursuits.

Using physical books, which people went out of their way to use, was also a critical factor in binding people together. Physical books referenced normative ways of reading which these parents and communities valued, as demonstrated by both the high proportion of physical books used in these activities and the great efforts parents went to insert them into the setting. This value was passed onto the children and was drawn from the collective meaning that these physical books held for family or immediate communities, for example editions of old books which had been read across generations. These books and the personalised recordings provided key forms of information for the children which embedded and legitimised their place within their longed-for community. This information provided an accessible and easily communicated way of knowing that the community remained secure in their commitment to each other. This was signalled through the continuation of known ways of reading together or the use of particular books, just as these communities had done before the pandemic. The materiality of these old editions or new recordings acted as an information source binding people together by signalling the ongoing connection between them at a time

of insecurity. MoN explains how she felt when she received the made-up story recorded for her and her sisters via WhatsApp:

> ‘It was really exciting because it was the first one that Granny had sent to us and also, she sent it to us when it was during lockdown and when I first heard it, it felt… it was really special to me because Granny had sent it from really far away.’

Customising these digital spaces to reference known reading practices and included known objects and people helped children and their immediate communities navigate the digital settings where this shared reading took place. This was a necessary element in providing an anchor as to how to act in a digital setting, where there were abundant quantities of digitally mediated information, which also shifted and changed over time meaning the practice was not always navigated in the same way each time. The information within and around these shared reading activities became contested, as sources which were valued by the customising adults were devalued by the automated digital platforms in favour of other forms of information which the platform privileged. Children also sometimes valued this information, viewing it as an attractive alternative to reading. This shifted the power dynamic from parents taking control of the necessary information partially out of their hands. Digital settings also meant that children were not able to be physically present with their loved people, reinforcing the sense of longing. AliN described how reading with his grandfather was not the same on screen, drawing attention to the importance of the physical body as an information source in shared reading through noting its absence:

> ‘He’s not really there, I like it when he’s actually there.’ – AliN

However, customising, by finding ways to include visual and vocal elements of the children’s loved people and powerful affective information like material books and their peritexts and illustrations, scaffolded the process of *binding together* to create sense of

belonging. The information foregrounded through customising afforded children and others the ability to navigate these new digital reading spaces, binding them to a familiar reading activity in a densely populated digital information environment. Children could access key information like the intonation of familiar people's voices and the meaning of their gestures and gaze in relation to the fictional narrative. Peritexts and illustrations were used to direct the reading and the conversations which took place around it. Recorded texts incorporated their own set of personalised paratextual elements and people – binding the work, the people and the setting together into a text encased in a recording which was easily delivered and used. This created a certainty as to how the texts would be received, lessening the uncertainties manifest in the digital environment through which it was delivered.

Engaging with these fictional stories provided a space through which children and their loved people could belong together despite their physical separation. *Binding together* was driven by sources of corporeal information as children and the people of their extended communities played out physical elements of their in-person experience. Not only did they share smiles or laughter but people also used their bodies to show their care for the children, leaning forward at crucial moments of text or making encouraging noises. Taking this a step further, AliN described how whilst reading together on Zoom his grandfather even tried to recreate the pillow fights they had when they were together in person:

> 'He just gets the pillow and smacks his own phone.'

Extended family and teachers also positioned themselves and reacted in ways which could reinforce children's sense of belonging and security as they navigated the digital setting. They set themselves up in familiar spaces in their homes; added elements to create humour or relaxation allowing children to see their loved people being relaxed and in familiar

and safe spaces which children knew from pre-lockdown visits. RaeO describes where his grandmother read to him:

> RO: She's sitting on the chair nearest the window, with the lamp that wraps around, over it. Or sometimes upstairs near the computer in the spare bedroom that Mummy and Daddy sleep in.

Parents and members of the immediate community went to considerable efforts to help children navigate these shared reading activities and children understood this. Books were sent by post, recreated as plays, embellished with costumes and props and recorded, photographed and transferred via digital platforms. People went to great lengths to read to the children. RobinN2 describes how his father read to them online whilst they were separated from him in another country and time zone for the three months of the first UK lockdown:

> 'And then do you know what happened every night? Daddy had to get up at midnight to tell us Wilbur and Edforth [a series of stories that the father had made up with characters based on his sons].' – RobinN2

Children understood this emotional work which had been done for them, that it signalled security and care for them. SkyN described how her grandmother's recorded story was intended to bind them together:

> 'It was lockdown and she wanted to like talk to us and kind of make us happy.'

These carefully customised and jointly navigated shared reading activities created a sense of belonging for children. Children understood that they were valued and understood through their loved people's efforts to connect with them during the pandemic. Through these shared reading practices children could draw on information sources which referenced their belonging to a group, binding them to an identity and way of doing things which existed in

spite of the pandemic and which was reasserted through these shared digital reading activities.

5.8 Chapter conclusion

Presenting the findings from this study, the chapter describes a set of shared digital reading practices which constitute the theory of *binding together*. The chapter identified four major categories, *Longing*, *Customising*, *Navigating* and *Belonging* and demonstrated how they contributed to the overarching theme of the study: *binding together*. Examined in the chapter through children's accounts of their activities in a new context, the theory of *binding together* will be explored through the study's theoretical framework in the following chapter.

Chapter 6: Analysis

6.1 Chapter overview

This chapter discusses the grounded theory of *binding together* in relation to the research questions. The theory of *binding together* emerges as a result of the ability of children and their families to maintain close ties to one another during a time of longing as a result of physical separation. They did this by customising and navigating highly localised information landscapes centred around shared digital reading which enabled them to create a sense of belonging within fictional works and with one another.

This chapter also refers to literature within and outside of Information Studies and uses various theories to unpack the key categories that form the grounded theory of *binding together*. The chapter references the theoretical framework and takes Barad's assertion that 'agency is not an attribute but the ongoing reconfiguring of the world' as a central sensitising concept. It also draws on Wenger's theory of Communities of Practice (1998) as an overarching frame to answer the research questions. It particularly references Wenger's 'modes of belonging' (1998 p. 173, also see section 3.5.4. this thesis) which pertain to identity making, and the notions of 'reification' and 'participation' which relate to meaning-making.

Through this conception of agency, Wenger's theory of Communities of Practice (1998) and drawing on further concepts as described below, this chapter looks at how information landscapes were customised by aligning to and reconstructing known practices in the face of separation from and longing for one another. It considers how information landscapes were constructed and customised through imagining new paratextual frames and by connecting people to old books which reference past personal experiences including in-person shared reading activities. It then explores how people navigated and engaged with information literacy practices, examining what enabled and constrained them including paratextual, material and bodily configurations. Lastly it draws on Wenger's ideas of reification and participation (1998 p. 55, 57) to explore how meaning was made through the social site – the 'field of embodied, materially interwoven practice centrally organized around shared practical understandings' (Schatzki, 2001 p. 11) binding together communities of practice. In doing this it draws on theories of social capital theory (Putnam, 2000); bibliotherapy (Heath *et al.*, 2005); paratexts (Genette, 1997; Gray, 2010; Birke and Christ, 2013; Van Dijk, 2014; Brookey and Gray, 2017; Barnett, 2020); picturebooks (Iser, 1978; Nodelman, 1989; Nikolajeva and Scott, 2006); epistemic objects (Cetina, 1997); emotional work (Hochschild, [1983] 2012) affect (Ahmed, 2014, 2020) attachment (Felski, 2020) and the body (Merleau-Ponty, 1962; O'Loughlin, 1998; Cheville, 2005).

6.2 Binding Together

An enforced and bounded state of separation from, and longing for, one another led to children and their extended family and teachers migrating online to read together, an activity which was actively mediated by parents to maintain people's connections. *Binding together* demonstrates how people negotiated separation from and reformulated connections to each other by customising shared digital reading activities by furnishing them with sources of social and corporeal, as well as epistemic information. This enabled children and their

immediate communities to navigate these activities in a way which reinforced their place within the group. In this way the information literacy practice, driven by parents' desire to bind their children to their immediate communities, created an information landscape which children were able to access through a range of information sources and understand as a place of security and happiness. They did this by referencing recognisable shared reading activities, using personally meaningful and specific reading material and creating personalised texts in the form of audio and video recordings. The information literacy practice served to embed children's identity as part of a group, within their family or school, binding people together within a co-created shared affective reading experience.

6.3 Assuaging longing

The children and families who took part in this study found themselves isolated from their family and school groups, as well as society generally, during the pandemic. The theory of *binding together* references the 'boundedness' which Barad has argued is an unnatural state which attempts to separate material and discursive, body and mind and nature and culture. Instead, their theory of agential realism foregrounds relationality. The theory of *binding together* references the unnatural state of bounded-ness which these children reported experiencing during the lockdowns and social distancing. During this time important relationships which children valued highly in their everyday lives were cut off by forces outside their control. The loss of these connections represented a loss of social capital for families. First put forward by Bourdieu (1986), the idea of social capital is here understood through Putnam's definition of: 'social connections among individuals – social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them' (2000, p. 19) and where the core idea is that these social networks have value.

The efforts of parents, extended family and teachers to reconstitute this social capital, the relations, connections and activity between children and themselves, to bind them together during a time of unexpected separation, can be conceptualised as a form of emotional labour in the case of the teachers and emotional work or emotion management in the case of the family members (Hochschild, [1983] 2012 p. 7). Hochschild ([1983] 2012) defines these as 'the management of feeling to create a publicly observable facial and bodily display'. She differentiates emotional labour as 'that which is sold for a wage' from emotional work and emotion management which refer to the 'same acts done in a private context.' (p. 7).

Emotional labour is a concept which has been used in Information Studies to highlight the relational aspects of library work and its affective impact (Julien and Genuis, 2009; Sloniowski, 2016; Douglas, 2020) including to create connection with others at times of isolation (McLay Paterson and Eva, 2022). This along with the findings of this study, suggest that there are aspects of wellbeing at play in this information work. Work on emotional labour, work and management has consistently found that it was predominantly carried out by women (Hochschild, [1983] 2012; Sloniowski, 2016; Douglas, 2020; McLay Paterson and Eva, 2022) and this too was the case in this study. This emotion work attempted to create 'long-distance intimacy' (Rottger-Rossler and Slaby, 2018 p. 12) for these children and their immediate community in a pandemic setting. Parents, primarily mothers, employed a form of 'community maintenance' (Wenger, 1998 p. 74) in reconstructing and customising shared digital reading activities. This maintenance extended to a number of different family members and although grandmothers were the primary readers, male relations also took part in the activities which stemmed from this community maintenance, re-creating a form of the lost social networks and the well-established relations between children and their immediate community.

From the children's point of view, the loss was not expressed as an absence of resources, rather it was expressed through their felt needs (Merleau-Ponty, 1962) whereby the body is conceived of as 'the matrix of habitual action' (Merleau-Ponty, 1962 p. 82) and knows the places to which it is attached. For children their loss was in the boundedness of the restrictions and the absence of the habitual activities which they took part in with their families, one of which was shared reading. In addition, this longing represented a loss of identity for children as part of their family or school class, where identity is conceived of as 'long-term, living relations between persons and their place and participation' (Lave and Wenger, 1991 p. 53) as supposed to something one inherently has.

In an effort to rectify these losses, adults created virtual shared reading sessions, extensions of existing communities of practice centred around books, stories and reading with known people. Lave and Wenger (1991) stress that the learning which takes place within these communities of practice does not necessarily take an educational form. In this case the 'learning' which was taking place was not primarily to learn to read, but rather it was to be re-embedded into a distanced network of relations -- either their extended family or their school class. It was from this strong affective starting position, to assuage longing, that the teleoaffective structure of the information literacy practice – that is to say the hoped-for-end of *binding together* was customised and navigated by the community of practice (Schatzki, 2002; Shotter, 2014) carried out in order to maintain functioning community systems by fulfilling the emotional needs of those who made up these relations.

The theory of communities of practice distinguishes between three modes of belonging: imagination, alignment and engagement (Wenger, 1998 p. 173) which are defined at the relevant points in this chapter. These relate to how people locate and orient themselves in a landscape of practice in terms of their identity (Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner, 2014 p. 21) and references the research questions about how information literacy practice is

constructed, enabled and constrained. This is significant to this study where data showed how strongly children considered their identities to be related to the activities they took part in with their extended family and teachers. In addition, this discussion chapter makes references to the Wenger's conceptions of 'participation' and 'reification', also as described in the theory and methodology chapter (Wenger, 1998, p. 55, 57, also see section 3.5.4. this thesis), as key to the process of meaning-making, which refers to the research question about how meaning was made from the resources at the disposal of the children and their families. Firstly, customising reading practices is viewed as a function of the alignment mode.

6.4 Customising reading practices

It was within the alignment mode of belonging (Wenger, 1998) that parents and teachers conceived of, created and customised the digital reading activities which were highly personalised towards the community of practice. Alignment is defined as 'co-ordinating our energies and activities in order to fit within broader structures and contribute to broader enterprises' (Wenger, 1998 p. 174). This was done by designating places in the home, devices, interfaces and reading material which were 'fit for purpose' (Lloyd and Wilkinson, 2019 p. 252), creating tailor-made information landscapes. These tailored information landscapes mirrored previously practiced in-person shared reading configurations, where many of the material elements of those practices were placed in service of recreating the longed-or situation.

The similarity to ways of reading together in person suggests an alignment to a certain way of reading, that is to say that the activity and processes which people enacted together was significant in situating them within the social site (Schatzki, 2002). The mobilisation and customisation of chosen devices, interfaces and books allowed for 'tinkering' to 'adjust the protocol to unseen events' (in this case the pandemic lockdowns) from which emerges a

practice in which an expert practitioner is able to perform the ‘same’ practice amid varying situations (Gherardi, 2009 p. 355). The overwhelming presence of extended family members, particularly grandparents, suggests that customisation took place in order to allow the experts in the practice (Wenger, 1998) to be able to participate in a way which suited them. In his work on the sociology of taste, Hennion (2005), adds that alignment to more experienced practitioners allows newcomers to delegate their judgement to those in the know, in order that they can get closer to ‘good things’ (p. 137). This suggests that how to best enact the desired actions, what Schatzki (2012) calls the ‘practical understandings’ (p. 16) of the extended family and teachers were a valued component of the practice.

Shared reading activities also varied in the ways in which they were carried out which points to a strong alignment to individually favoured ways of doing things. This suggests that these localised practices were prefigured products of social interaction where layers of meaning have been created over time (Kemmis, 2006; Schatzki, 2012) and that practices are historically formed, shaped through histories and traditions that locate them in such a way that they are ‘inherited already formed’ (Kemmis, 2006 p. 2). Work in bibliotherapy, in which the root belief is that “that information, guidance, and solace can be found in books” (Brewster, 2018 p. 3), suggest that there are three key elements to implementing this successfully. These are the creation of a group environment, the person reading and the chosen text. This aligns with the way in which these shared digital reading activities were customised, to foreground and enable a particular person reading, a specifically selected text and the creation of a group environment which highlighted certain familiar elements in service to creating connections between them.

Customising shared reading activities remotely created something which was ‘socially recognisable as a practice’ (Gherardi, 2009 p. 356). Children responded with habitual and familiar movements which suggested they understood the practice they were taking part in

(Merleau-Ponty, 1962; O'Loughlin, 1998). They sat with folded arms as they might on a school carpet at story time or sat up and leant forwards as their teacher read to them. In more relaxed situations with family, relaxed into sofas and beds with siblings often sitting closely together. The sociohistorical space, which had been recreated digitally, held a latent meaning for the children who enacted a form of cultural and cognitive knowing through their bodies (Cheville, 2005). This tacit knowledge (Gherardi, 2015 p. 50) manifested itself corporeally and the those taking part in the shared reading acted not only towards each other but towards the material resources, which played a part in shaping the actions of their bodies (Schatzki, 1997; Nicolini, 2012) and suggested some sort of collective organisational memory was at work (Schatzki, 2006 p. 1867). The alignment to the enactment of a specific set of processes and actions suggests that it was in the doings and sayings of these practices that identity resided in relation to one another (Lave and Wenger, 1991; Schatzki, 2002). This embodied collective memory was an expression of their information literacy, as the children tapped into ways of knowing that were sanctioned by their family.

The customisation of these elements went beyond alignment to the generally socially recognisable to the creation of highly localised practices both in terms of the way in which the readings were presented and the books which were used. This discussion now turns to the recreation of the localised ways of reading and refers to the imaginative mode of Wenger's modes of belonging which is defined as 'creating images of the world and seeing connections through time and space by extrapolating from our experience' (Wenger, 1998 p. 173).

6.4.1 Customising texts and paratexts

The first way in which shared reading activities were customised to reference individual circumstances was in the creation of recorded content, which accounted for one third of the data collected. The recordings, in which people made and produced their own audio or video

texts, indirectly specified the way in which the content was to be consumed or interpreted through virtue of the device, digital interface or paratexts. For example, a video uploaded to google classroom was more likely to be listened to at the kitchen table during home school, than a recording made and uploaded to a toniebox which was kept in a child's bedroom.

Meaning was also extended through these recordings as highly personal additions were made including dedications to their intended audience, explanations of why the particular work was chosen in relation of the creator of the text or its recipients, the inclusion of props or costumes and the settings in which the recordings were made were used to create a mood. For example, a teacher, dressed as the main character of the chosen work, describes the rooftops which she can see from the window of the room she is recording in, creating a dreamy and relaxing atmosphere before she begins to read *Aunt Amelia* (2014) by Rebecca Cobb, a fantastical picture book about an alligator babysitter dressed all in pink. This contrasts with the chaotic and hilarity-filled 'theatre' created by the family performing the story *Elephant Learns to Share* (Graves and Dunton, 2016) which involved numerous props devised from everyday household items including a toy Panda taking centre stage in place of a toy Elephant who features in the story, but which the family did not own. These in media res paratextual additions (Gray, 2010 p. 40) contributed depth to these stories.

In doing this, these recordings created formulated directives or 'rules' as well as 'general understandings' which are understood as abstract senses, in this case the mood of the reading (Schatzki, 2012 p. 16). The creation of these recordings were boundary-making practices which by their nature involved exclusions (Barad, 2003 p. 826) for example the dedicated or personalised stories were intended for no one else or the 'in-jokes', making it clear who the recording was for, sanctioning membership of the group (Wenger, 1998). These in media res paratextual additions to the literary work, bounded by the recording, created a text, a distinct digitized literary object (Barnett, 2020).

Notable too was the corporeal presence of the significant person themselves in these recordings. This bodily appendage to the work served two purposes. It enabled the work's accessibility by a playful and affective dimension (Geraghty, 2015) as the known person's reading or interpretation of the text was personally directed towards the children and encouraged their participation, an acknowledged beneficial factor in shared reading (Hargrave and Sénéchal, 2000 p. 77). Secondly, the recordings add what Matt Hills (2002) in his book on fan cultures describes as an 'auto-context'. 'Auto-context' refers to people's affective play around media texts, play which relates to their emotional attachments and where they imaginatively create their own set of boundaries: rather than being caught up in a set of pre-established cultural boundaries (Hills, 2002 p. 112). The auto-contexts of the recordings directly referenced the individuals that the recording was made by and those it was directed towards. These auto-contexts can be seen as evidence of the situated and contingent nature of information literacy practices which, although socially and historically shaped, are constructed with reference to specific sites of knowledge and known communities rather than a set of pre-prescribed conventions (Lloyd, 2017).

The recordings allow for the making, marking and remixing of the work (Knight and Weedon, 2010; Rowsell, 2014) creating a highly individualised and specific form of user-created texts, with micro audiences and ephemeral lifespans (Gray, 2010; Geraghty, 2015; Pesce and Noto, 2016). In media res paratextual additions were used to create these transient texts and to 'conjure up a certain atmosphere' (Felski, 2020 p. 71) separate from the work, and flavour them with localised meaning. Their very creation highlights the importance of the recipient who the recording is aimed at and emphasises that it has been made just for them. Children reported that they understood this, and that knew the person who had made them cared about them.

In these ways these recorded texts, including their in media res paratexts ‘subtly or radically inflect’ the reading (Gray, 2010 p. 43) in the individualised way in which the text highlighted the relations between the book, the reader and the setting and its intended user. Hills (2002) writes about how the fan’s act of appropriation of a text is a ‘final act of consumption’ pulling a text away from the public and towards the private (p. 145). The addition of in media res paratexts which the recorded medium allowed, gave parents and teachers the power to create the inflection of their choosing; this constructed the text in a way which foregrounded the relationality and close bonds between the people within the community of practice.

The imaginary mode of belonging (Wenger, 1998 p. 173) which these recorded texts enabled, allowed people’s own experiences and conceptions of the text and the world to come to the fore. In doing this, they materially create a boundary around this context-dependent information landscape, binding people together through relations with the text.

6.4.2 Reconstructing works

There were clear and extensive efforts by adults to position, reproduce and use chosen literary works across all of the customised reading activities, including the recordings referenced in the previous section. Here too were instances of the imaginative mode of belonging (Wenger, 1998 p. 173) within a community of practice at work. The chosen work, or more often the selection of works, most often contained in physical books, which had been curated by the adults and were chosen individually by the children, were selected to have specific meaning to the children and their immediate community, including meeting their emotional needs: for example, tackling feelings of worry, boredom and isolation during the lockdown. The careful choice of topic ties in with the factors which contribute to the success of bibliotherapy which emphasises the need to personalise book choices particularly around

children's needs (Heath *et al.*, 2005 p. 566). These and the most common choice of books – those which were old family favourites and had been read to previous generations -- suggest that the choice of literary work represented a form of bonding capital (Putnam, 2000).

Bonding capital, which is part of Putnam's (2000) conceptualisation of social capital theory (p. 19), refers to the robust bonds which create trust and reciprocity between those who share affiliations, often to the exclusion of others. These treasured works held significant collective meaning to the families in localised ways which could not be reproduced or understood elsewhere. It was not just the choice of works which were carefully customised and which represented a form of bonding capital, but also the physical books which held the chosen works. This mirrors findings from Kucirkova and Flewitt (2020) who found that nostalgia plays a part in parents' choice of formats (p. 15), as well as Mackey's (2016) assertion that memories of reading are intertwined with the sheer physicality of their props (p. 171). It also suggests that the material properties of the book including the peritexts contribute to the narrative work, enabling it to become the text, and that material properties, including paratexts, hold meaning-making properties in their own right (Gray, 2010).

Part of the specialness of these books related to their age. This added a temporal aspect to the shared reading activities, creating a different conception of time to 'real' time, one which references past, present and future (Heidegger, 1962; Schatzki, 2006a). Here books which have stood the test of time across generations were foregrounded at a moment of separation and isolation for those families. The very act of shared reading, of taking up these books again was one of relationality or *binding together*, at a time when relations were constrained. Those within this community of practice had held different identities over this extended period of time which the material books represented: the parents were once the children who were read these books, the grandparents were once the parents who had read to them and children were familiar with these changing identities. The nostalgic associations

were multiple, not just of the parents' and grandparents' previous identities – which the children understood clearly – but the children also identified with the books as the ones which they had read, when they had been able to visit their grandparents in their own homes, when their relations with one another were secure. In tune with findings from Davies, Lupton and Gormsen Schmidt (2022) and Rothbauer and Cedeira Serantes (2022) books represented a different movement of time (Pink, 2011 p. 348) within the information landscape. The artefacts, sayings and doings of that information landscape surpassed the lockdowns, reminding these communities of practice of generations and childhoods gone by and their still existing bond to them through the presence of these books. These books represented enduring relationships during a time of isolation.

In addition, the specific editions of books carried localised nostalgic meaning for each specific community of practice. These personally meaningful books were grouped together over others and held designated places in the homes of the grandparents or children, physically demarcating their specialness. These individual copies or editions were tools of practice by which these groups could define and signify their membership (Lloyd, 2021). They were not just 'neutral carriers of information' (Barnett, 2019 p. 309) but rather their material properties signified their heritage 'shaping what [was] perceive[d] and why it comes to matter' (Felski, 2020 p. 7).

Here too children had picked up on these sanctioned forms of reading material referring to them as the 'real' or 'proper' books and in this way aligning to the preferred format of the community of practice. Sara Ahmed (2014) writing about affect, defines the term 'stickiness' as 'an effect of the histories of contact between bodies, objects and signs' (p. 90) describing it as 'the accumulation of affective value' (p. 92). She argues that to name something is 'to transfer the stickiness of that word': 'real' or 'proper' in this case 'to an object, which henceforth becomes generated as the very thing that is spoken.' (p. 94). It is

useful to note here, in this study which places great emphasis on material objects, that Ahmed's definition of object is not that of a material or physical objects, but rather is differentiating 'between instrumental goods and independent goods' and uses the examples of honour or intellect chosen with a view to happiness (Ahmed, 2020 p. 34). In naming the physical books as 'real' or 'proper' these books become the sanctioned way of reading for these families. Ahmed (2020) describes objects as becoming sticky 'because they are already attributed as being good or bad, as being the cause of happiness or unhappiness' (p. 35). These groups of physical books, marked out as special and good, to be read again and again by different children and different generations in the pursuit of happiness held positive attributes for those who used them. In addition, Ahmed (2020) argues that 'the association between objects and affects is preserved through habit' (p. 35). So, the continued use of these 'real' and 'proper' books, including in this online pandemic reading setting, and replete with the positive meaning attributed to them previously, and now again during an unprecedented pandemic, preserved their association as treasured and important to the families.

In this way it was these specific books, in their relationality to those who used them now and those who had used them previously, which came to matter in the information landscape. As Barad (2007 p. ix) argues, memory is not a record of a fixed and linear past but rather 'a reconfiguring of past and future that is larger than any individual.' Using these specific sociohistorically situated books became an enactment of vernacular literacy, in which the connection to localised information is 'situated, contingent and drawn from local experience' (Lloyd and Wilkinson, 2019 p. 256) making these ways and means of shared reading deeply meaningful elements of reconfiguring memories.

Barad (2003) uses an example of a ruler meaning nothing unless it is interacting with the thing it is measuring (p. 814), and similarly, these old books and the texts within them came to mean something when they came into contact with the people who cherish them and

whose past selves had a history with them, including ways of acting in relation to them. To reiterate here, that the children in these practices knew and understood why these works, housed in certain books, were significant and what they represented to the community. Their stickiness, to use Ahmed's (2014) term 'depends on histories of contact that have already impressed upon the surface of the object.' (p. 90). Understanding the sources of information, which includes why they are valued and sanctioned, is part of becoming an insider and defining the boundary of the environment to outsiders (Lloyd, 2010c). Ahmed describes 'stickiness' as 'a form of relationality or a "withness", in which the elements that are 'with' get bound together'(Ahmed, 2014 p. 91). In this instance, the legitimised books and ways of reading these books were bound to the children and the other members of the community of practice. The information qualities of the old books allowed children to situate themselves within the information landscape (Lloyd, 2010c) providing a difference from other forms of reading material, which in turn made a difference to the way the shared reading activity unfolded (Bateson, 1972 p. 459). Understanding that the books were significant and meaningful to their families meant that they also understood that being read these loved books included them as important in the group, providing a deeply personal and sanctioned engagement with the site.

Drawing on the ongoing familial love and connection, these books provided an affective form of information in the landscape. The emotional labour invested by parents through the use of material objects acted as a prompt to feeling. The insertion of these books was a demonstration of care and affection for each other and a reminder of past experiences and activities, signalling the enduring connection to their immediate community. Felski (2020) argues 'that aesthetic experiences are *forged* rather than just *felt'* as the result of many things coming together (p. 130, her italics). The mediations which forge these experiences are not, she contends, extraneous to the work but rather form an essential part of the work, how it

is viewed and why it matters (Felski, 2020 p. 7). In this way these old books, referencing past experience, usage and affection as part of the information literacy practice, shape the information landscape as a place of longstanding and ongoing care.

6.4.3 The construction of information landscapes

The customising element of *binding together*, which takes place in the face of separation from and longing for each other, creates the conditions for the construction of information landscapes. These reconnect social networks through information literacy practices adhering to both the imaginative and aligning modes of belonging to a community of practice. The information landscape construction takes on two different forms. The first is to reconstruct the reading practice virtually and mirroring children's habitual forms of in-person reading, either in each other's homes or at school, complete with familiar forms of information including sets of rules, understandings and teleoaffective structures. This enabled children and their significant others to draw on known information landscapes relating to their in-person shared reading activities, reconstructing versions of these digitally in ways which were familiar, binding the children through the action of the practice with their longed-for people with whom they had previous experiences of this way of reading.

Secondly, texts were constructed to reflect and foreground the auto-contexts (Hills, 2002 p. 112, also see section 6.4.1. this thesis) of the people who were using them and referenced localised and familiar forms of information. The boundaries of the information landscapes were constructed to frame the narrative work in a way which referenced a group identity. The way in which the information landscape was customised, via parents' emotional labour, allowed access to forms of tacit and nuanced information which was expressed during the shared reading activities enabling children to develop their sense of belonging. This intersubjective way of understanding their membership of the group, their belonging to one

another, was vital to understand during the pandemic. Despite their physical separation they were emotionally connected to others through the process of *binding together*.

Customising these practices also emphasised power relations. Information landscapes were constructed by the adults creating a set of understandings, rules and teleoaffective structures (Schatzki, 2002) according to the perceived needs of the community of practice. The power to create these structures was within the hands of the adults and within this stabilized practice came the power 'to restrict the space of possible negotiation and to inscribe certainty of performance into the practice itself'(Gherardi, 2009 p. 356): this is described within the findings chapter as the creation of a 'walled garden' (see section 5.4.3. this thesis) in which adults controlled the information children could access in the digital setting and controlled the way in which texts were created and received. These specific constructions had real material consequences (Barad, 1996) enabling and constraining the children's information literacy practices. These are elaborated on in the next section of this chapter which explores the navigating element of *binding together*. It references the engagement mode of belonging of Wenger's communities of practice (1998) which is defined as 'the active involvement in mutual processes of negotiation of meaning' (p. 173). Children could only exercise choice within the 'walled garden' (see section 5.4.3. this thesis) which had been created for them by adults to foreground certain information sources in order to enable the delicate process of negotiating viable identities (Wenger, 1998, p. 175) which are apparent in the children's navigations.

6.5 Material and paratextual navigations

The significance of the materiality of the physical books was not just nostalgic or localised. Their materiality played a 'structuring role' (Hayler, 2016 p. 17) which configured the navigation of and engagement with the works. Within the customised information landscapes

people enacted information literacy practices in relation to the visual, material and paratextual qualities of the chosen books which both enabled and constrained the practices.

The majority of works in this study were of fiction and two-thirds of the reading material was illustrated. Most of the illustrated books were picturebooks. For young children, where reading written text was a work in progress or a relatively new ability, the illustrations provided a source of information through which they could decode the text (Moerk, 1985).

Picturebook texts differ from illustrated books, where the illustrations only illuminate the words. Picturebooks, on the other hand, rely as much on the visual as the written elements to convey the narrative (Little, 2015) and in particular the interplay between the text and the illustrations is used to create meaning (Iser, 1978; Nodelman, 1989; Nikolajeva and Scott, 2006) including in the way in which the words and the pictures transact with and transform one another (Nodelman, 1989 p. 220). Iser's (1978) notion further defining 'the gap': whereby meaning is made by the reader who fills the 'gaps', in the case of this picturebooks this is between the what is written in the text and what the illustrations show and vice versa, thus the reader becomes the 'co-creator'. As a result, the visual representation of the illustrations enabled understanding and meaning-making. Illustrations were used as a frequent point of reference as well as to explain the text, prompt questions and discussion about it, supporting research that shows that illustrations heighten the quality of participation in adult-child interactions in children's shared reading activities (Garner and Parker, 2018; Merga and Ledger, 2018) and in their information literacy practices (Lundh, 2011; Hedemark, 2017). The importance of the illustrations is highlighted by the children who were listening to recordings, where they or an adult reached for a physical copy of the book that they were listening to, in order to include the illustrations into their information landscape.

The physical book and accompanying peritexts also played a role in decoding the narrative in these practices. Nikolajeva and Scott (2006) point out that in a picturebook,

which is just thirty-two pages long (Jalongo, 2004) – the standard size of a picturebook, -- the paratexts, or more specifically the peritexts to keep to Genette's terminology, 'come to carry a substantial percentage of the book's verbal and visual information' (p. 256). Do Rozario (2012) takes this a step further, arguing that the very physicality of the picturebook designates this genre and that the perceived boundaries between the physical object and the narrative collapse upon the process of reading it. The physical book acts as a source of information which guides and directs action. For example, 'the drama of a turning page' (Bader, 1976 p. 1) prompts the modulation of readers' voices in keeping with that drama, providing a corporeal enactment of information literacy.

Peritexts of physical books also paced and drove the narrative along guiding the reader and the listener's actions. They were used to convey a set of general understandings around the 'worth, value, nature or place of things' (Schatzki, 2012 p. 16). Titles were used to create an air of anticipation, illustrators' names were used to denote value, and covers were used to prompt speculation about the works. Peritexts also comprised sets of 'rules' (Schatzki, 2012 p. 16) in that they directed the readers in certain ways of reading. They provided trajectories of action in answer to the ambiguity of the text, playing a part in the 'subtleties of timing and delay in the social organisation of talk at a micro level' (Emirbayer and Mische, 1998 p.1000). In this way, physical books and their peritexts acted as social, corporeal and epistemic modalities of information and drove people's information literacy practice by prompting action from readers.

The materiality and paratexts of the books held not only an interpretative function (illuminating the meaning of the text) but formed navigational tools to guide reader reception of the text in a more mechanical sense (Birke and Christ, 2013 p. 68). These navigational peritexts conferred a sense of pride on the children about how far they had come and were used to encourage their attention or engagement. They also allowed them to make choices or

steer towards a favourite story. Ingold makes the point that ‘we know as we go, not before we go’ (Ingold, 2000 p. 230) and the materiality of the book and the attendant peritexts allowed an understanding of the process, through which people came to know how to act ‘*in relation* to the other elements of the environment’ (Pink, 2011 p. 348, her italics), an example of Schatzki’s practical understandings, which guide how actions should be carried out (2012 p. 16).

The findings of this study show that those reading and those listening both reacted and modified their actions in relation to minute peritextual directions and configurations. As with the paratexts of the recorded content, the peritexts of the physical book should be regarded as part of information literacy as they move and shape readers’ interpretations and as such provide a ‘difference which makes a difference’ (Bateson, 1972 p. 459). An agential realist account has it that ‘agency is not something which someone or something has’, rather it is a ‘doing’/’being’ in its intra-activity’ (Barad, 2003 p. 826-7). These micro-agentic intra-actions include the peritextual agentic relations which come into being when they are taken up in the moment of action and as part of the material-discursive practice enable engagement with the narrative work.

6.5.1 Hyperparatextuality

The influence of the micro-agentic configurations on the reading practice extended past the physical book and into what Barnett (2020) has characterised as the ‘read-in-browser digital environment’ in which the reading took place (p. 43). In the case of these child-focussed shared reading activities, the digital environment did sometimes comprise of browsers in the case of Google Classroom or YouTube but also comprised of the rules and regulations of the digital affordances of the toniebox or the Yoto player where beeps, lights and electronic voices guided the reader.

Earlier in this chapter the role of adult control has been emphasised, including the creation of texts in the form of recordings complete with the addition of personalised in media res paratexts, as well as control over the reading matter and digital devices used to construct these reading activities. In particular this allows the adults within the situation the paratextual privilege to control the reception of the texts in the manner of their choosing (Gray, 2010).

However, the adults were not able to entirely control the configurations of the digital spaces in which reading took place, which as Rothbauer and Cedeira Serantes (2022) point out have become ‘increasingly individualised and on the move because of digital devices’ (p. 114). The walled gardens (section 5.4.3.) of their readings still existed in hyperparatextual settings. In the findings of this research, some digital material elements took on paratextual qualities, framing the texts. These would align with what Van Dijk (2014) characterises as ‘dynamic digital paratexts’ (p. 40) which ‘cluster around a digital text and become part of it’ (p. 24). Taking Barad’s (2003) position that matter, including digitally material matter (Shep, 2015) is a ‘substance in its intra-active becoming - not a thing but a doing, a congealing of agency’ (p. 822), it becomes important to follow Leornardi’s suggestion that, in examining practices, consideration should be given to ‘which features are ‘material’ (significant) for this user’ (Leornardi, 2010 p. 15). In this case, it is the material elements which took on paratextual qualities, framed the work and influenced its reception as a text.

Certain hyperparatextual elements, the interface displays, beeps, digitised voice messages, lists of available reading recordings had an impact on the information literacy practices of the children in this study and these elements were situated and contingent. This supports Völcker (2020) and Uricchio’s (2016) assertions that paratexts provide meanings which are fluid and negotiated. Van Dijk describes these dynamic digital paratexts as ‘ambivalent spaces that are neither completely in, nor outside of the work’ (2014 p. 40) but

which do form part of the production of the electronic literary object's meaning. These contingent paratextual features come about within the hyperparatextual environment of the digital interface, can be considered an 'object of knowledge' (Cetina, 1997) where in addition to merging with and shaping the text they can also expand 'into an infinite online context' (Van Dijk, 2014 p. 24). An 'object of knowledge' later renamed as an 'epistemic object' (Cetina, 2001) are artefacts which are always in the process of being materially defined (Cetina, 1997 p. 18) and continually acquire new properties, as things which 'continually "explode" and "mutate" into something else' (Cetina, 1997 p. 15). For example, the photographed illustrations of the books for AliS and SkyS enabled their information literacy. Conversely the unwanted thumbnails of the digitized pages of the picture book which suddenly appeared as SkyS touched the screen constrained his access to the work. The illustration he had been looking at before an accidental touch of the screen caused it to disappear was replaced with thumbnails of all the book's illustrations as well as files of all the other photos stored in iPhoto – an example of an object of knowledge (Cetina, 2001) leading outwards to other pathways. These examples highlight Van Dijk's (2014) point that in digital reading contexts it is not always clear where the site of the work begins and ends and that it can appear in different contexts. For these children the change in the material contexts in which they encountered the texts made a difference to how they were able to engage with and understand the text. These findings support Brookey and Gray (2017), Johnson, (2017) Skare (2020) and Barnett's (2020) suggestions that interfaces matter paratextually speaking and that these interfaces' designs impact on how useable and visible the user created texts are.

Many of these dynamic digital paratexts, which formed part of the object of knowledge comprised of the digital interface, arose around the recordings. In creating these user-generated texts, these in turn were subjected to their own set of paratextual framings.

Examples of this include the displays, beeps and digitised voice messages directing the listener from the tonieboxes, Yoto players and Kindles, lists of available reading videos (and other content) displayed in Google classroom streams and the YouTube timeline which acted as a ‘navigational paratext’ (Birke and Christ, 2013, p. 68) for the YouTube video watched by WynnS.

These digital dynamic paratexts situated within these hyperparatextual environments required the children to navigate them. They had to understand specific routes through Google classroom content streams to enable them to find the video they were looking for or knowing how to adjust the volume for a story recording which is quieter than the others. In the case of the YouTube timeline, it acted as a navigational paratext to the video of the teacher reading, alerting the user on how to navigate to the different parts of the video. When timeline preview obscured the illustrations of the picturebook which the teacher is holding up, WynnS’s practice is constrained, unable to see the illustrations and hear the text in concert – as previously described - a key factor in accessing picturebook texts. This speaks to Barnett’s (2020) point that the tools of the programme, in this case the YouTube interface, used to access the text, will be supported by different understandings of the user experience (p. 53). In this example, the YouTube timeline, designed as a helpful guide, begins to act as an algorithmically created and contingent navigational paratext, which acts in media res to obstruct the work and the meaning making capacity of the child. This gives credence to Gray’s (2010, 2017) conceptions of in media res paratexts where paratexts do not just form a perimeter around the text but that they can also be encountered after the ‘entering’ the text. (Gray, 2010 p. 35). It also reinforces Van Dijk’s (2014) argument that the distinction between the ‘inside’ and ‘outside’ of a text is problematic in digital settings. Here a piece of information, the YouTube timeline, intended as adjunct to the main event of the text, takes centre stage ‘inside’ the text of the recording.

Dynamic digital paratexts which appeared contingently in these digitally mediated reading activities require the requisite skills to enact and execute the practice in context (Lloyd and Wilkinson, 2019). Enabling these skills requires understanding that information landscapes are touched as well as seen (Hicks, 2018 p. 158) and that touch and haptics are key part of digital literacy (Mangen, 2010, p. 419). It also supports the assertion that ‘information competencies cannot be taught “for life”‘; rather they are subject to ‘a complex system of social relationships and work organization’ (Tuominen, Savolainen and Talja, 2005 p. 331). What constrains and what enables information literacy practices is not internal (Sligo and Jameson, 2000) but rather it is socially, epistemically and corporeally nuanced and contingent. In this way the children could not fully draw on corporeal modalities of information in these moving digital environments and as such were not always able to enact information literacy in these contingent situations (Lloyd, 2017).

Paratexts of all kinds, including in media res paratexts of the recorded texts; the peritexts of the physical books; navigational paratexts and the dynamic digital paratexts of digital interfaces, are a form of information in their own right, nudging information literacy practice into certain ways of unfolding. This conceptualisation considers information to ‘change the way the receiver perceives something, to have an impact on [their] judgement and behaviour’ (Davenport and Prusak, 2000 p. 3). Paratexts do this by exerting ‘illocutionary force’ (Genette, 1997 p. 10), a communicative effect which makes requests of those within the practice, in which agency is a matter of intra-acting (Barad, 1996 p. 183) of coming into contact with paratextual forms of information (Desrochers and Tomaszek, 2014). These can provide customisable reading experiences ‘but they also provide escape routes out of the texts and out of the immersive reading experience’ (Barnett, 2020 p. 45) which had been carefully designed by parents, extended family and teachers. Paratexts influenced ways of knowing within the information landscape; they enabled participation by directing ‘how to

feel, what to expect and what things mean' (Nicolini, 2012 p. 5). Paratexts are part of the enactment of information literacy as an expression of and with reference to 'the social' and are part of the 'doings and sayings of the site' (Schatzki, 2002, p. 73; Lloyd, 2010b).

6.5.3 Corporeal navigation

The use of digital devices also played a critical role in these practices as they both enabled and constrained the body within the practice. Bodies, in their intra-action, created meaningful engagement through voice, gesture and gaze. This meaning generation comes not from objects affecting one another but rather it comes about in the actual process of seeing, hearing, tactile encountering (Merleau-Ponty, 1962). In this study the digital devices meant that it was not just the carefully chosen work or the physical book which could be present within the practice, but that the children could experience the actual practice of shared reading including the bodies of those experienced members of the community of practice: extended family and teachers, as 'a site of encoded knowledge' (Lloyd, 2005 p. 86). For the children in the practice observing these bodies-in-action filled information gaps in the fictional work by observing and understanding their gestures, gaze and tone of voice (Lloyd, 2005 p. 86) which facilitated meaning making. These bodily enactments towards the works and one another mattered because, following Schatzki (2009), they enabled people to contingently adjust their behaviour to what others were doing, which he termed 'harmonization' (p. 43-44). Bodies are the vehicles which allow people to enact a form of mutual engagement though understanding each other's nuanced corporeal configurations, which in this case were made visible or audible through devices.

The findings of this study show that digital devices sometimes fell short of enabling the body within the reading practice. Children missed the physical contact with their loved ones during shared reading and despite trying to recreate digital versions of play, they understood that there was 'just the screen there' (RaeO). The children reported struggling to

adjust their bodies to the new spatial dimensions of the online version of shared reading. During the lockdown the lack of physical touch altered the habitual games, horseplay and affectionate gestures which accompanied their in-person shared reading practices. Here, physical touch in absentia becomes clearly definable as an action which enacts information literacy, enabling creative play and emotional connection between people. The body becomes unsuitable for use as 'ready-to-hand' equipment, instead becoming conspicuous as a 'present-at-hand' object (Heidegger, 1962 p. 102 - 103) which does not function in the way it would in the in-person shared interactions which these shared digital reading activities mimicked. When the body is absent from these practices it becomes clear that it has a role to play in information literacy, in this case in shaping creative and affective elements of shared reading. In this way the body acts as a source of information and 'should be recognised as an important element in becoming information literate' (Lloyd, 2005 p. 87).

However, families taking part in these activities did bodily communicate their engagement in the story as well as their interest, love, care and affection for one another in these practices. The bodily reactions of the extended family and teachers and the ways in which they used their bodies in reading became part of the narrative creation of the story being read. The 'co-production of the body that loves and the loved object' (Hennion, 2005 p. 139), in this case the chosen work, allowed for a practice in which the reader's body exercises its ability to create meaning by reading carefully chosen works aloud. Readers used the tempo of their voices to create emotional meaning: speeding up to show chaos and excitement and slowing down to create soothing endings or by putting on different voices for different characters. Just as the paratexts and materiality of the book are part of the physical book and the narrative upon reading it, so too is the body's relationship to the text when it comes into contact by reading it. In this way the body contributes to the information landscape by fleshing out the fictional world of the work, adding layers of meaning as the

work is spoken and gesticulated into existence through its intra-action with the body, creating the text as it ‘decants’ the work gathering ‘it up as play, activity, production, practice,’’ (Barthes, 1977 p. 162 -3).

However, these practices involved more than just one person ‘eliciting particular reactions and sensory responses’ from another (Rowsell, 2014 p. 119). The attunement to the narrative was a matter of intra-action – not a ‘feeling-about but a feeling-with’ (Felski, 2020 p. 42). It was the social and relational aspects between people’s bodies which also brought forth meaning (O’Loughlin, 1998 p. 281). Exchanged glances, nods and minute vocal interventions – the ‘oohs’ and ‘ahhs’. Minute bodily movements which when shared in reaction to the work gave the children and their significant others the opportunity to ‘practice their emotional connections with other people’ (Vermeule, 2009 p.165) in reaction the fictional characters and but also to one another. In this way the body acts as a source of information, not only for its owner but also for those who observe it (Lloyd, 2014 p. 94).

Cheville, in her work on women basketball players (2005), emphasised the need for a deep level of trust to achieve a state in which players are thinking and moving as one (p. 95). Children reported their attachment, trust and love for their extended family and teachers. Their presence in these reading activities met the levels of deep trust required to act in concert with one another in a playful and creative manner. This, in turn, meant that the meaning-making aspects of the information landscape could be accessed effectively. It also highlights why these practices are difficult to capture on film for research: the presence of a smartphone recording is not a trusted presence.

6.6 Reification and participation

These intra-actions which incorporated books, paratexts, devices and bodies in their relationality came together to allow an attunement with the narrative. Attunement was the ‘result, not of a break with the social’ rather of things “coming together”‘ (Felski, 2020 p. 78)

that allowed the children to ‘achieve presence’ (Noe, 2012 p. 12), not a decoupling of their minds from the external stimuli (Mackey, 2016) but rather arising from forms of information: social, corporeal and epistemic within the practice they were able to competently engage with and become attuned to the story. This manifested in the video data in their becoming still and gazing into the middle distance. Fictional characters and places were something that children could access. They described touching stars or being afraid of crocodiles because they were actively participating within an intra-action which had come about not in spite of the books, paratexts, devices and bodies but because of the intra-actions with them (Schatzki, 2002; Barad, 2003). Children’s participation in the narrative went beyond engagement with stories to become a social experience involving entry into and membership of social communities, (including fictional ones) which Wenger defines as participation (1998 p. 55-7) as described in the theoretical chapter (see section 3.5.4).

Wenger describes both participation and reification as essential in the negotiation of meaning (Wenger, 1998 p. 52). Reification was also evident in these practices in which children gave form to these narrative experiences congealing into a nameable thing (Wenger, 1998 p. 58). They were named as adventures, as ‘going somewhere’ or away from the boredom of their homes. These chosen stories and books became something in their own right. They were reified into ‘thingness’: stories and fictional characters had unique meanings for the child, they were imagined into existence as part of their everyday worlds, which they knew, stood in unison with or opposition to and discussed with their extended family and teachers.

6.6.1 Affective Bodies

This active social participation with one another was evident in the relational vocal and bodily expressions. They did not just move individually in reaction to the works, but rather people bodily mirrored the way others used their voices and gestures to express that story,

through their corporeal intention: exchanging significant looks at key moments in the text; leaning forward, pausing and then sitting back again as the reader's voice crescendos as the poem reaches the climax and then ends; humming along to the rhythm of poem your grandmother is reading; making noises of surprise or exclamation, which punctuate the readers emphasis of the full stops. These were not merely an external expression of the internal processes of the speaker but rather as an expression of the relations between people (Schwandt, 1998 p. 240). This suggests that further work in this area with reference to both Voice and Performance Studies could be an area of future inquiry.

These bodily communications are a form of 'reflexive agency' which 'arises out of the reality of language exchange' as well as 'bodily actions and positionings between people' (O'Loughlin, 1998 p. 284-5). Through these 'agential doings' the recipients of these efforts understand 'how they *should* orient themselves' towards one another (Shotter, 2014, p. 309, his italics). The old and familiar works (including their materiality) were a terrain through which these agential doings were enacted. People were enabled by negotiating meaning in familiar ways, acting as 'extensions of their memory' (Gherardi, 2009 p. 354) as they acted towards one another and the narrative works. In this way these material objects become part of the congealing of agency which moves people in particular ways in relation to the narrative and each other (Barad, 2003). This was a form of embodied knowledge, a corporeal modality of information which was 'tacit and gained from the body in action and passed from person to person' (Lloyd, 2014 p. 91).

These bodily actions and positionings were not just enacted in relation to the narrative. They were also evident in the ways in which people reacted towards one another by bodily showing their care and concern for one another. Grandparents glanced fondly up as children struggled or managed to read a difficult word, people mirrored laughter and smiles at references to their own and other family member's lives. This 'affective attunement' (Stern,

2010 p. 42) or the sharing of another's experience – enabled a 'nexus of living meanings secreted in intersubjective exchanges' (O'Loughlin, 1998 p. 287). By enacting these bodily actions people participated with one another, showing care towards each other through fleeting moments of emotional investment. Merleau-Ponty describes the body as 'a spontaneity which teaches me what I could not know in any other way except through it' (Merleau-Ponty, 1964 p. 93).

The active participation detailed here was also referred to by the children who knew that their extended family and teachers wanted to make a connection to them: as MoN had it the point of her grandmother's recorded story was 'to make us think of her [their grandmother]'. They labelled these reading practices as happy. The happiness, relaxation, love and care which children reported experiencing, was reified into a living experience for them, which they connected to this shared reading practice. The convergence of participation and reification was enabled by sanctioned and localised information landscapes. By literacy practices which allowed children to create meaning making which referenced not just themselves but themselves in relation to fictional spaces, past experiences, material objects and to others. All this binding them together within a meaningful practice in which children could participate with their longed-for immediate community, restoring a sense of collective identity.

6.7 Chapter conclusion

This chapter has discussed the theory of *binding together* through theoretical and empirical literature from the field of Information Studies as well as from work on communities of practice; social capital theory; bibliotherapy; paratexts; picturebooks; epistemic objects; emotional work; affect; attachment and the body and drawing on the theory and methodology laid out in Chapter 3. Demonstrating how *binding together* explains how information literacy shaped the information landscape of the shared reading practices during a time of social

distancing, this chapter also draws attention to the sociohistorically referenced reading practices which placed children and their immediate community into recognisable reading practices transferred into online contexts. It also draws attention to paratexts and shows how they both enabled the use and creation of texts which emphasised personal relations between those in the practice, as well as sometimes constraining entryways into the carefully customised text. This highlights the issues of parental control inherent in shared reading practices with children which are directed by adults and take place in online environments. Lastly it shows how meaning was made through modalities of information which contributed epistemologically, corporeally and socially to the understandings and connections made by those who took part in the practice, binding them together during a time of social isolation. In the following chapter the significance of this study's findings and discussion will be discussed in relation to Information Studies scholarship.

Chapter 7: Discussion of research questions

7.1 Chapter overview

In this chapter, the theory of *binding together* that emerged from the data analysis is used to discuss the study's research questions which are represented below. The theory of *binding together* demonstrates children and their families' attempts to reconnect to one another during a time of separation via the recreation of established shared reading practices using innovative digital means. The chapter starts by discussing how children and their families enacted information literacy related to shared reading in socially distanced settings. It continues by exploring how these information landscapes were constructed, followed by an examination of what enabled and constrained their shared reading activities. Lastly it explores how the resources available to them in the social site allowed the enactment of meaning-making between the children and their families.

The research question and sub questions which guide this thesis and structures this chapter are:

> How did young children aged four- to eight-years-old and their families experience information literacy practices relating to shared digital reading in their homes during 2020-2021?

a. In what ways were information landscapes related to shared digital reading constructed?
b. What enabled and constrained the ways in which these information literacy practices were enacted?
c. How was meaning made from the resources at the disposal of the children and their families?

7.2 How did young children aged four- to eight-years-old and their families experience information literacy practices relating to shared digital reading in their homes during 2020-2021?

The theory of *binding together* demonstrates how information literacy was driven by the desire to maintain connections between people during the pandemic. Information was customised and navigated to elicit a sense of belonging between people from their enforced state of longing. This information was drawn from a wide variety of information sources: textual, embodied and social. Material objects like physical books, illustrations, paratexts, digital recordings and devices played a vital role in mediating this information and enabling people's information literacy.

The overarching research question centres on how, during social distancing, children and their families experienced information literacy practices relating to shared digital reading. The theory of *binding together* suggests that, as a practice, information literacy is situated and contingent and learned in practice (Lloyd 2017). It also demonstrates how information literacy is embedded in everyday life activities and takes place within the flow of action. The theory of *binding together* illustrates this through showing how children and their immediate communities enacted their information literacy in shared digital reading practices in domestic settings. These practices were embedded within and inseparable from other activities such as

playing games together or chatting to one another, and additionally took place amid routine occurrences like eating breakfast or playing with the cat.

The theory of *binding together*, through its categories of customising and navigating, also demonstrates how people's actions are both individual and related to the context they find themselves in, but also strongly influenced by social practices including information practices, as well as taking place in relation to material objects (Tuominen, Savolainen and Talja, 2005). This is highlighted through the category of navigating in how children reacted to different information sources which were not stable, but rather changing according to the micro digital contexts in which they were enacted. At the same time, previously established in-person shared reading activities were referenced in these newly created digital counterparts. This was demonstrated through the customising category, which showed how information literacy was enacted through the use of valued and sanctioned material objects in the form of old books or recorded videos which referenced or captured certain ways of reading. These material objects made up information sources in their own right and shaped the affective and sociohistorically situated nature of the information literacy practice through which the shared reading activity was understood.

The theory of *binding together* reinforces the point that conceptions of information literacy should reflect 'communal and collaborative aspects of information-related skills and competencies' (Tuominen, Savolainen and Talja, 2005 p. 338) by demonstrating the heavily collaborative aspects of these shared digital reading practices. They extended beyond the reader and listener and even past the parental instigator to peripheral players who recommended reading material, listened in and took part in other activities around the reading. This suggests that Communities of Practice (Wenger, 1998) continues to be a useful theory in information literacy practice research, concurring with Folk (2021). The emphasis on the social, material and process-driven aspects of the practice reinforces the suggestion

that ‘existence is not an individual affair. Individuals do not pre-exist their interactions; rather, individuals emerge through and as part of their entangled intra-relating’ (Barad, 2007 p ix).

The theory of *binding together* draws attention to access to information as a key element of social capital which has been highlighted in educational contexts by information scholars (Pilerot and Lindberg, 2011; Folk, 2019, 2021). Specifically, *binding together* references bonding capital (Putnam, 2000) which is used to connect ideas around emotion work and information where information sources contribute to wellbeing and community maintenance (Wenger, 1998). *Binding together* shows this through demonstrating how parents’ emotion work centred around foregrounding sources of information which would reinforce strong connections between people and reference their past experiences together creating a sense of collective identity and mutual care at a time of difficulty. This relationship between emotional work and information to create connection during times of isolation is supported by research by McLay Paterson and Eva (2022) whose research also took place during the Covid-19 pandemic.

The theory of *binding together* supports the sociocultural suggestion that information literacy is ‘social and communicative, multiformat, multicontextual, multigenerational and culturally situated’ (Agosto, 2022, p. 723). This is manifested in the theory of *binding together,* as two sides of the same coin. The first side of that coin involves recognising that the information landscapes through which shared reading activities took place were imbued with the creation of highly innovative and individualised forms of information. They involved multiple objects, formats and reading materials -- from audio and video recordings to physical books to homespun theatrical adaptations of books, -- as well as using digital photos of illustrations, costumes, props, physical books and everyday objects. In doing this, new texts were created with new sets of paratexts which accompanied the work, presenting it

to a specific reader and directing them on how to receive it. In other cases, curated selections of books were gathered together for children to choose from. These forms of information creation were highly personal and multicontextual in that they related to children's individual circumstances and the wider pandemic context. In this way the theory of *binding together* supports the assertion by Cox, McKinney and Goodale (2017) that practices are remade and renegotiated through participation, innovation and new technology (p. 187).

On the other side of the same coin, this careful innovation through customising information was in part designed to provide continuity for everyday activities (Trace, 2007 p. 143). The everyday activities in this case were multigenerational shared reading practices which were socially and culturally situated. New variations on the socially recognisable shared reading practices involving a known and trusted person and a book were created through the customisation, curation and mediation of information sources that shaped the information landscape. In doing this, the theory of *binding together* reinforces the suggestion that information practice involves habitual ways of interacting with information in socially and culturally established ways (Savolainen, 2007; Agosto, 2022, p. 5). The peritexts of physical books provided a way of reinforcing these normative ways of reading by providing precise directions to the reader and shaping the activity around the established traditions of reading.

The shared and social nature of these information practices demonstrated by *binding together* relates to the socially and culturally established ways of reading, in this case an adult and a child sharing a book. Scholars in information practice suggest that communities share many habitual information practices and repeat a core set of information practices over extended periods of time (Savolainen, 2007). This draws attention to the temporally mediated nature of the theory of *binding together*, which suggests that the practices are inherently linked to the influence of experts, in the form of the extended family and teachers, who exert

a form of corporeal knowing-in-action, which has been build up over time and was often enacted in relation to material objects including illustrations and peritexts. The theory of *binding together* suggests that information literacy practices are enacted in relation to teleoaffective structures (Schatzki, 2012). These hoped-for-ends which in this case was the desire between family members and others in children's immediate community to reconnect with and show their care for one another during a time of separation, came about through the enactment of an everyday activity comprising shared reading. In this way, *binding together* shows how an information landscape can be constructed with an affective starting point. In this study the information literacy practice was driven by parent's desire to promote connection between children and their immediate communities thus promoting their happiness and wellbeing. Sarah Ahmed (2020) argues that our understanding of happiness needs to take in the original Middle English meaning of the word happiness in which 'hap' suggests chance, that is to say that there is a question of contingency in happiness (p. 30). Parents in this study used affective forms of information in order to create the best possible chance of promoting connection between others through shared reading activities leading to their happiness. They used these sources of information to combat the challenges presented by the isolation of the pandemic and the highly contingent and physically separated nature of online interactions, leaving as little as possible to chance. This chapter will now further detail the ways in which the theory of *binding together* answers the research sub-questions.

7.2.1 In what ways were information landscapes related to shared digital reading constructed?

The construction of information landscapes forms the focus of the first sub question. The theory of *binding together* demonstrates that families constructed their information landscapes with a strong reference to local sites of knowledge (Lloyd, 2017) including family traditions, established ways of reading or in-jokes and with reference to children's individual

circumstances including the new pandemic context. The theory of *binding together* also demonstrates that information landscapes are co-constructed and that families have a strong influence on this. This was also found in Hicks's (2018) research on student stays abroad which explored how information supports language students transition when studying abroad. Although the adults in these practices took a dominant role, which will be unpacked in this section, the theory of *binding together* also shows children to be active producers and shapers of media content (Pink *et al.*, 2016), which supports Trace's (2007) research on how people are socialized to create as well as use information, where he found that young people engage in information creation activities rather than just receiving them.

The theory of *binding together* also highlights the intergenerational nature of information practice in relation to shared reading. Trace (2007) suggests that people draw on a stock of knowledge derived from interactions with others, as well as their own experiences, to make sense of the world around them. The parents, primarily mothers, who took the lead in customising the information landscapes ensured the presence of a high proportion of grandparents. Whilst the theory of *binding together* attributes this to assuaging children's longing for these people, it is also interesting to consider, in light of Trace's work their presence the grandparents as 'expert figures' whose past experiences of shared reading put them in a position to sanction and legitimise the construction of these information landscapes. Teachers too, as authority figures, provided a degree of legitimacy to the digitally mediated reading practices. Grandparents and teachers facilitated the process of children becoming members of these reading communities. The socially and historically shaped, recognisable and tailored practices allowed children and their extended family and teachers to enact a form of cultural and cognitive knowing through their bodies (Cheville, 2005) demonstrating that information is enacted bodily and giving credence to the inclusion of the corporeal modality of information in the research design.

The use of physical books, which were referenced and navigated via their peritexts and material qualities also suggests that information practices are influenced by historical ways of knowing and doing. This also highlights the importance of social information sources in this context, where experts connect novices to the tacit norms and values of the community. This was evident in the theory of *binding together* as children referred to ‘proper’ or ‘real’ books. The theory of *binding together* shows that these stocks of knowledge, conveyed via material objects in the form of physical books, were understood by young children and contributed to a way of knowing about reading together, shaping children’s identities by aligning them to the familial or class group and their accepted ways of reading together.

This reference to sanctioned ways of reading highlights the role of trust and power evident in the theory of *binding together*. It demonstrates how books were used to provide a temporal sense of security in an uncertain context. This security was dependent on the heritage and prior use of the books, which was instrumental people’s attachments to them, a finding which is supported by the research of Rothbauer and Cedeira Serantes (2022) in their work on everyday reading experiences in libraries. *Binding together* suggests that certain forms of affective information influence socially and historically shaped reading formations which are sustained and continued through communities of practice, suggesting a form of soft power at work. In this way, the theory of *binding together* highlights Pilerot and Lindberg’s (2011) assertion that information literacy research has a tradition of showing how information literacy landscapes are constructed with certain elements foregrounded and others knocked back. The theory of *binding together* highlights how ways of reading with certain people and material objects in the form of physical books and newly created recorded texts with highly personalised paratexts became ‘sticky’ (Ahmed, 2014, 2020), during a time of disruption and uncertainty, in order to wield the soft power required to bring people together.

Concurrently, the creation of these ‘walled gardens’ (see section 5.4.3, this thesis) in the form of curated reading, recordings and particular people suggested the exclusion of other elements, for example alternative books, people or ways of reading. This included ebook reading platforms which parents criticized for the selection of books available or for how easy it was for young children to independently access content which matched their reading level but which did not contain age-appropriate content. It supports Haider and Sundin’s (2022) work on trust and agency in the digital environment. They suggest that when there is low trust in the digital environment people become highly committed to evaluating information and take responsibility for doing so (p. 1187). *Binding together* suggests that parents became active shapers of not only the content but also of the way in which the content was delivered and accessed via digital means, selecting trusted sources. In this way *binding together* suggests that information creation may also play a role in relation to the topic of trust in digital environments. It shows how parents carefully customised information landscapes to foreground certain people and books, to tightly control how the work was read and received and to exclude access to wider digital activities. The creation of these ‘walled gardens’ (see section 5.4.3 this thesis) relied heavily on the framing devices or paratextual elements which were used to shape and guide the reading experiences, demarcating the boundaries, suggesting that greater attention could be paid to how information is framed. These paratextual elements are further explored in the following section, after an explanation about how the corporeal modality of information enabled and constrained the information literacy practices.

7.2.3 What enabled and constrained the ways in which these information literacy practices were enacted?

The theory of *binding together* shows how the construction of the information landscape was enabled and constrained by material objects and bodies which shaped action (Schatzki, 2012).

It does this through understanding the social site as a nexus of practices and arrangements that structure human co-existence (Schatzki, 2005) and influence children's engagement with the site. The actions of children were built in relation to the conditions of the social site rather than around external attainment goals or towards the acquisition of skills. The navigating category in the theory of *binding together* demonstrates how situated and contingent young children's information literacy practices were, especially in shifting digital environments. These shifting digital environments lend credence to the suggestion that information literacy is a sociocultural practice and not one of developmental levels to be reached. The emergent theory of *binding together* contributes to filling the dearth of research into 'how participation is manifested in concrete activities' (Hedemark, 2017 p. 122) and into generating deeper understanding about the contexts in which children use books (Hampson Lundh, 2013).

Binding together backs up the assertion that 'the act of becoming information literate is the act of learning how information resides in the landscape and learning the context-specific practices required to access it' (Lloyd, 2005 p. 85). It does this by demonstrating young children's struggles with digital interfaces, which at times led them down the wrong routes from those which were intended. It also demonstrates this by evidencing how children understood that taking a different route through an interface at different times would lead them to different outcomes. Learning in context-specific practices is also showcased, via the theory of *binding together*, as something which draws upon the social, corporeal and epistemic modalities of information and the connections between them, confirming their reported value in studies of information literacy practices (Cox, McKinney and Goodale, 2017) and contributing to the COST (European Cooperation in Science & Technology) call detailed in the literature review of this thesis (see section 2.6) to consider digital reading in a way which takes the social, material and embodied into account (Sefton-Green *et al.*, 2016).

In particular, the use of participatory video data allowed the theory of *binding together* to show how people's bodies moved in concert with one another and with material objects in order to take up information, create information and to convey their understanding of information. It shows how bodies coupled with material objects were both enabled and constrained in enacting the information literacy practice, a key aim of which was to engender connection between people. Screens enabled the body as a source of information displaying gestures, gaze and tone of voice but also constrained the practice when information which relied on physical touch was absent: 'there's just a screen there' (RaeO). The exposition of the corporeal modality of information, via the use of video data, also allowed for the distinction between the explicit and codified knowledge (Somerville and Lloyd, 2006) which distinguished between the explicit act of reading a story and concomitant codified act of showing love and affection for one another which was enacted in the practice. In this way the value of considering reading from an embodied point of view to generate new knowledge, as suggested by Rowsell (2014) is highlighted. It is also important to emphasis the use of video data as instrumental in exploring children's experiences of information literacy particularly when they are engaging in highly contingent and situated digital settings where information changes depending on the user.

The relationship between the body and material objects was also highlighted in how shared reading activities were enabled and constrained. *Binding together* draws attention to how touch plays a role in information landscapes via material objects including digital objects which has been pointed out in Hicks' work (2018) It concurs with the assertion by Lloyd (2009) that the sensory provides a vital source of information, in this case enabling the reading activity. In this study attention was drawn to material objects, in the form of paratexts, which in their various forms, detailed in the discussion chapter, enabled and constrained the practice. *Binding together* shows that paratexts, when exhibiting the qualities

of epistemic modalities of information consist not just of textual or even visual information but also of sensory information like beeps and lights which guide the reader and frame the text. This quality of epistemic modalities of information has also been drawn by Cox, McKinney and Goodale (2017) in their study of food logging which suggests that further study of non-textual epistemic modalities of information might be a fruitful area of study in the Information Studies field.

Paratexts played a key navigational function (Birke and Christ, 2013) in both enabling and constraining young children's information literacy practices related to shared digital reading. *Binding together* demonstrates how paratexts provide direction about how to act within the environment, what Schatzki (2012) refers to as 'practical understandings' (p. 16). It also demonstrates how children and adults modified their actions and reacted to peritextual directions and configurations. Introducing the sensitising concept of paratexts and the variations which come under that umbrella term and using them in an information literacy context allows the theory of *binding together* to demonstrate the importance of what frames and connects information. It allows analysis of relations between information sources and in so doing enables analysis of how information is presented and how this presentation might change the ways in which the information is received. Similarly, in their work on digital infrastructures and algorithms Haider and Sundin (2022) suggest that 'understanding the conditions of information access is on a par with understanding information and information sources' (p. 1179). The study of paratexts has been show by this study to facilitate this theory.

Binding together also draws attention to how the arrangements of a site limit and enable children's engagement with the information landscape. As referenced earlier (see section 6.5.1. this thesis) these arrangements tended to be drawn by adults to create boundaries in hyperparatextual environments, where epistemic objects within them diverted

children's attention away, either intentionally on the children's part or not, from the reading activity which had been customised for them. Understanding the shifting changes of these situated and contingent digital environments and the power relations within them (not just between humans but non-humans too) again highlights that information literacy is not a skill which can be taught for life (Tuominen, Savolainen and Talja, 2005). Rather it is made in the moment, enabled and constrained by multiple agentic pulls, including the minutiae of the paratextual, and needs to be studied as such.

7.2.4. How was meaning made from the resources at the disposal of the children and their families?

Paratexts, in their traditional book form, their dynamic digital form and as the framing instruments to newly created recordings provided meaning making properties in the shared reading activities of children and their families. *Binding together,* by utilising practice theory and taking the practice of the unit of analysis, shows the relations which come about between paratexts and people and how paratexts micro agentic influence provokes people's feelings, expectations and meaning making through indicating their worth, value or nature (Schatzki, 2012 p. 16). Paratexts too, were the providers of trajectories of action which assuage ambiguity in the text, directing readers in how to use their voices, the physical books and the work within them.

Binding together shows how illustrations created meaning for the children and their families, providing sources of dialogue and discussion. This research showcased how illustrations and texts work in relation to one another and in turn in relation to the reader, and how the necessity of those illustrations was demonstrated when the physical books containing them were added into the practice by young children and their families when listening to audio only recordings. This preference for visual content by young people is shared in Agosto's (2022) work on adolescent literacy. Lundh (2011) stresses the need to take

multimodal activities into account to better understand the enactment of information literacies, which the theory of *binding together* contributes to.

Meaning was made through this information literacy practice by people drawing on their own experiences, demonstrating how information literacy is socioculturally influenced and situated in context. This was manifested through the old books including certain physical editions held collective and unique meaning to families. In addition *binding together*, drawing on Hills (2002) concept of auto-contexts (see section 6.4.1 this thesis) argues that the highly personalised recorded audio and video recordings pull the fictional work away from the generic and tailor it for a specific audience through the creation of individualised information sources. In this study this was done through in media res paratexts which created recordings which were destined for specific children. In demarcating boundaries through the creation of a private work, meaning was made about the identity of those who are sanctioned and their inclusion into the community of practice. This concurs with Trace's (2007) assertion that knowledge of how to create and use information plays a pivotal role in relation to notions of affiliation.

Haider and Sundin (2022) argue that to understand questions about information literacies there is a need to address for what purposes and with what interests people use information. *Binding together* elucidates this by demonstrating the influence of fictional works and characters which related directly to children's own experiences or circumstances and were presented to them in ways which also demonstrated the connection to and care of their immediate community. Folk (2021) reinforces the importance of personal significance in meaning making in a study on university students. In a related work, Folk (2019) argues that the cultural contexts in which situated practices take place can alienate or isolate certain student populations. The domestic setting from which the theory of *binding together* emerged, with its familial and class communities of practice goes to the same point, but in

this case, it shows how situating practices within personally meaningful cultural contexts can legitimise membership of the group. This section has shown how the resources at the disposal of the families, including the corporeal and the material as well as social modalities of information, were shaped and personalised to create meaning for the young children and their families, in turn creating feelings of belonging to the group and contributing new knowledge to the understanding of affect and emotion in reading.

7.3 Chapter conclusion

This chapter has discussed the theory of *binding together* through theoretical and empirical literature from the field of Information Studies. Demonstrating how *binding together* explains both information literacy practice and shared digital reading activities which are central to this study, the chapter highlights the complex nature of children and their families' shared digital reading activities during a time of social distancing and illuminates how they learn to participate within a new context. The implications of these ideas will be discussed in the next chapter, which forms the conclusion to the study.

Chapter 8: Conclusion

8.1 Chapter overview

The aim of this thesis was to answer the central research question which asked how young children and their families experienced information literacy practices relating to the shared digital reading during a time of social distancing, resulting from the Covid-19 pandemic. This central question was broken down into sub questions which aimed to understand how information landscapes related to shared digital reading were constructed, what enabled and constrained the enactment of information literacy practices and how meaning was made from the resources at the disposal of the children and their families.

The literature review of this study recognised that the majority of studies into children's shared and digital reading focus on adult perspectives and the comparison of formats and the acquisition of skills were dominant themes. The study therefore argued that that children's perspectives hold value whilst situating shared digital reading as a social practice. It suggested that reading is not bound to single formats or ways of reading. Lastly it discussed how insights can emerge from investigating the actions and processes of people and objects in their reading activities, rather than by measuring etic goals in relation to reading attainment.

The findings of this study generated the theory of *binding together* which describes how families and communities used particular books and stories to create a sense of closeness

and togetherness during a time of isolation. This chapter explores the theoretical, methodological and societal contributions of the study. It looks at the contribution to Information Studies research, to reading research, as well as the limitations of the findings. The chapter concludes by outlining directions for future areas of study.

8.2 Theoretical contributions

The theory of *binding together* describes and explains children and their families' experiences of information literacy practice in relation to shared reading in digital settings during the Covid-19 pandemic. By producing a record of this time, it provides insight into a unique moment in history. Situated in Information Studies, this work also draws from Publishing Studies, and reading research. In doing so it provides fresh perspectives and reasserts the importance of certain concepts. In Publishing Studies, the research introduces the concept of information literacy which originates in Information Studies, and draws from sociocultural perspectives and practice theory. In Information Studies, it demonstrates how the concept of paratexts can be of central importance to people's experiences of information rather than residing on the fringes of it.

The theory of *binding together* contributes to the COST (European Cooperation in Science & Technology) (Sefton-Green *et al.*, 2016, also see section 2.6 this thesis) call for interdisciplinary research which pays attention to the social, material and embodied aspects of reading, which was highlighted as a warrant in the literature review. Using sociocultural conceptions of information literacy was central to this contribution. It does this by viewing information literacy as a practice which draws upon a wide range of information sources, including the social and the corporeal and the epistemic, as well as paying attention to the material. As a result, the theory of *binding together* demonstrates how this range of information sources shaped children's ability to engage with and understand shared reading activities in a new digital setting, which is to say how they became information literate in this

context. It highlights how the information literacy practice was customised and navigated by information sources which were contingent, personalised and shaped by past experience. This in turn provides an understanding of reading as situated and understood in the context in which it is carried out (Lundh, Hedemark and Lindskold, 2022). In this way *binding together* offers up a nuanced account of children's shared and digital reading. This provides an alternative to the reading research detailed in the literature review, which focuses on decontextualised skills and which is often reported by others who are not situated in the practice.

Employing a sociocultural concept of information literacy and understanding it as a practice opened up perspectives through which to explore how children engaged with information in ways which cultivated their happiness and wellbeing at a time of difficulty. This suggests that the emotional contexts of early literacy experiences are influential in children's perceptions and enjoyment of reading. *Binding together* highlights the role played by material objects like physical books, digital recordings, digital platforms and digital devices like iPads, demonstrating how they acted as affective information sources and were instrumental in socially and historically shaped reading activities which were meaningful to groups of people in varying and highly heterogenous ways.

The theory of *binding together* did this by employing an agential realist perspective which considers phenomena to be emerging from material-discursive practices which are influenced not only by humans but also non-humans. This study joins the handful of information literacy practice studies which have used the work of Barad to understand the complex configurations which take in digital and physical environments (Lloyd, 2010b; Pilerot, 2014; Hicks, 2018; Burnett and Lloyd, 2019; Haider and Sundin, 2022).

Reading research scholars Felski (2020) and Murray (2022) as well as those in the Information Studies field (Lundh, Hedemark and Lindskold, 2022) have argued that reading

research is in need of mid-level approaches, offering a space between close reading and macro quantitative studies. Utilising practice theory provided a mid-level approach in this study by taking the practice as the unit of analysis.

By using the work of practice theorist Theodore Schatzki, this study suggests that shared reading activities are socially and historically mediated and bound by certain understandings influenced by the reading habits of others. This sociohistorical emphasis demonstrates the elements of power which are at play in shaping and cultivating children's shared reading and digital activities. *Binding together* provides a unique insight into how ideas about normative conceptions of reading emerge in domestic and familial settings. It also evidences how adults wield a form of soft power to create conditions of inclusion in these communities of practice and how this is sometimes hampered in digital settings. It does this by showing how power is dispersed, including across non-human objects such as books, paratexts and digital platforms. This feeds into work in Information Studies which shows how sanctioned forms of reading play out in institutional contexts and contributes an understanding about how certain forms of reading have come to be considered acceptable (Lundh, 2011; Pilerot and Lindberg, 2011; Folk, 2019, 2021).

Similarly, employing Schatzki's conceptualisation of practice combined with the corporeal modality of information and via the use of participatory video data, *binding together* demonstrates how affect and emotion were formative of the teleoaffective structure of the practice, in which families sought to reconnect with one another during a time of longing and separation. This demonstrates how information literacy can be driven by teleoaffective structures, that is to say the hoped-for ends. This answers scholarly calls for the study of affect to be included in research with children in Information Studies (Bilal, 2005) and beyond (Gaudreau *et al.*, 2020). It also suggests that the prolific existing research into the

etic attainment goals and skills related to children reading misses an important point about why people are motivated to read.

In addition, the use of practice theory was combined with the study of paratexts, providing a theoretical innovation as to how paratexts are analysed. Paratexts were considered useful in this study because they allowed the analysis to move beyond the use of particular formats for reading and the comparison of eBooks versus physical books, which dominates scholarly research. In particular, paratexts viewed through a practice theory lens facilitated the study of reading in digitally mediated environments in which relations between things are subject to change and not bound by physical formats (Murray, 2022). Viewing paratexts through a practice theory lens placed a focus on relationality, sharpening the focus on paratexts as meaningful 'in a zone not only of transition but also of *transaction'* (Genette, 1997 p. 2, his italics). Considering paratexts from a reception or user perspective in context, rather than from close reading or the perspective of the producer of the text (where scholarly work has often been focussed) foregrounds the relational capacities of the paratext and shows how they exert agentic manoeuvres in how reading activity is shaped and received. *Binding together* demonstrates how paratexts influence users in their reception of the text through the use of participatory video data, including how they enable and constrain information literacy practice in relation to shared reading. Studying the practice, of which the paratext is part, allows an exploration of agency which, from a practice perspective is considered to be made possible by the conditions of the practice (Nicolini, 2012 p. 7). This offers up an alternative approach to paratextual analysis to reading research and Publishing Studies scholars.

The theory of *binding together* presents unique findings in relation to material aspects of digital reading which diverge from the over-researched comparisons of eBooks vs physical books. It does this by drawing on work from media and communication scholar Gray (2010) who was influenced by Barthes. This work reconceptualises texts as made up of the work

plus the paratext, creating a sociocultural unit. *Binding together* demonstrated the use of adult and child created texts, in the form of the digital recordings that families and teachers made during the pandemic to send to one another and how the recordings encapsulated the social and cultural elements through which a work becomes a text. These findings contribute to twenty-first century research into contemporary book and publishing culture showing how digital means and social media facilitated these ephemeral texts created for micro audiences.

In addition, the theory of *binding together* demonstrates that paratexts are significant players in the shaping and creation of information and could take a more central role in Information Studies research. Paratexts are a useful addition to understanding the modalities of information which furnish the information landscapes which influenced people's enactments of information literacy, socially, corporeally and epistemically. Also apparent in the findings is how certain digital dynamic paratexts found in this study, and which are considered epistemic modalities of information, are not necessarily textual, but can also be visual or aural, supporting the finding by Cox, McKinney and Goodale (2017). The focus on paratexts means that the theory of *binding together* contributes to the small body of research (Pecoskie and Desrochers, 2013; Desrochers and Pecoskie, 2014; Skare, 2020, 2021) in Information Studies which draws attention to the central significance of paratexts in understanding information, rather than relegating them to a peripheral position.

This study represents the experiences of children from their point of view which, as the literature review demonstrated (see section 2.6.1), is lacking in children's reading research. It also provides valuable research findings into children's reading practices in domestic settings, which have been identified as an important field for research (Gillen, Flewitt and Sandberg, 2020; Sairanen *et al.*, 2022) including in Information Studies (Danby, 2017; Agosto, 2019). In the Information Studies field, the examination of young children's approaches to information literacy in their shared digital reading activities also offers a

contribution to the field, in which information literacy context has been ‘presented largely in terms of adult work’ (Agosto, 2022 p. 727). This study is one of very few which demonstrates how children’s participation is manifested in concrete activities and where a deeper understanding of these reading activities, explored through a sociocultural perspective of information literacy practice, has emerged in relation to how the specific contexts in which children took part in shared digital reading activities shaped their practices. It did this by using children’s perspectives to highlight other ways of knowing and understanding an activity than etic understandings of reading imposed by adults.

It also joins studies which draw attention to the importance of intergenerational intra-actions relating to digital technologies and shared reading including, in Information Studies, the work of Agosto (2022). This intergenerational influence is framed within the theory of *binding together* as a social modality of information which shapes information practices. This study reinforces the importance of studying reading in the presence of others as pointed out by Kuzmičová *et al.*, (2018). It draws attention to the role of extended family, not least older people who are often neglected in children’s reading research which has been highlighted by Gregory, Long and Volk (2004) and relates this to the temporal aspect this finding lends to reading practices. This emphasis on family, and children’s places within it, reinforces Livingstone and Blum-Ross’s (2017) finding that despite the pace of digital change, children’s concerns around identity, participation and family continue to be of importance to them and therefore to those who research them (p. 55).

Lastly, *binding together* demonstrates that shared reading activities contribute to the wellbeing of children during times of difficulty and change relating to separation from their established communities by promoting relaxation, enjoyment and the sense of belonging to a community. This lends credence to those studies which use bibliotherapeutic interventions

(Baverstock *et al.*, 2021; Merga and Kristin, 2021; Adeyeye and Oboh, 2022) and indicates that bibliotherapy is an area worthy of study worth of further attention.

8.3 Methodological contributions

The study's use of constructivist grounded theory provides a key contribution of the study. This study joins Lloyd (2017) and Hicks (2018) in using a constructivist grounded theory approach to engage in theory building from an information literacy perspective. It provides a detailed insight into the shape and meaning of information literacy in relation to children's shared digital reading activities and in so doing, widens the scope for information literacy research.

The study makes use of participatory video methods with young children within a constructivist grounded theory framework which has not been done before in relation to information literacy research and is a contribution of the study, constructivist grounded theory having traditionally emphasised words. Using participatory video data enabled a focus on the actions and processes of children and their families as well as their reflections on specific activities. This reflects the complementary nature of constructivist grounded theory and visual methods with their focus on process and action as highlighted by Hicks (2018a). It means that young children are not reliant on their language abilities to represent their understandings of a situation. In addition, video data was used to conduct theoretical sampling in a context where returning to the field and to co-researchers was not practical. This theoretical sampling was conducted not only by focussing on the human interactions with a focus on the body but also by sampling with a focus on material objects.

Aside from constructivist grounded theory, the use of video methods represents a contribution because participatory methods have been identified as an underexplored area of information literacy research (Hicks and Lloyd, 2018), despite a strong tradition in Information Studies of using video methods with young children (see section 2.8, this thesis).

It refutes claims that it was not possible to gain children's perspectives on their reading activities during the pandemic by employing an innovative research design to do so. The use of participatory video methods in this study also opens up avenues about how to conduct research remotely and research when people find themselves in challenging circumstances. Participatory video methods also allowed these co-researchers to push back on the prescribed boundaries of the researcher in a non-confrontational way in order to present their version of events. They did this in the form which they submitted their data as well as what was within it, highlighting again a central theme of this thesis that 'forms effect meaning' (McKenzie, 1999 p. 13). In addition, these boundary-making practices highlight the power and responsibility the researcher holds in creating their research design and demonstrates how ceding certain elements of this power might lead to richer data collection.

The information giving and ethical process which formed part of this research design was inseparable from the use of video methods with young children. Without it, it is unlikely that parents and children would have consented to their video data being used for research purposes. This study makes a contribution on how to conduct ethically responsible research when working with co-researchers using participatory methods, in challenging circumstances and in high-risk research scenarios, in this case collecting visually identifying data from young children. It does this by focusing on information and consent protocols as research apparatus, by considering consent to be something which emerges through intra-actions rather than something which an individual has to give over to another, and by drawing on practice theory, sociocultural notions of information literacy and the study of paratexts to produce accessible information to potential co-researchers about taking part in research.

This study makes a contribution to the wider academy by demonstrating how considering information literacy (seen from a sociocultural point of view) can be an essential aspect of research design and how this can shape and influence how information is

experienced in relation to research participation. The methods used in this study are significant because they tightly adhere to the research paradigm and theoretical framework of the study demonstrating how theoretical and methodological continuity can be achieved in a research design, even in relation to information and consent protocols. This is done by utilising publisher practitioner experience of how to reach potential audiences and carefully considering what that potential audience might respond to, in this case in relation to taking part in research. This research suggests that methodological innovation can come about via practitioner knowledge and that the field of Information Studies is uniquely placed to contribute to this area.

8.4 Societal contributions

The implications of this research suggests that other ethically necessary forms of information presented to children within the media rich environment, for example data privacy notices and requests to use and store children's data, should be presented to them in ways which they can access and understand. Barad (2003, p. 816 - 817) writes about the responsibility of the researcher in creating and examining research apparatus. The findings of this research suggest that organisations which request the data of children have a responsibility not only for the sound nature of that information but also for the form in which it is presented to that audience. Doing this requires an understanding of how information is framed and positioned for people, which this research suggests is, in many instances, driven by the paratexts which frame information as well as by other material elements.

Understanding how information is framed, as a key area of information literacy practice matters in a society which is privy to a plethora of disinformation. Paratexts, viewed from a practice theoretical position, provide a valuable source to understand how information is framed and as such they provide a pedagogic tool to explore how information is shaped and who creates it, by examining what surrounds it. Incorporating a greater place for paratexts in

information literacy research opens up new avenues for understanding people's information experiences, not only for those who research it, but also for those who teach information literacy.

In relation to this, this research has demonstrated how information literacy related to digital settings is contextual and situated. Data collected for this study provides evidence in multiple instances about how children and others experience highly situated and contingent information literacy experiences in digital settings which change depending on a number of factors. Understanding that young children's (and all people's) experiences online are not uniform but rather are tailored to them, means that sourcing data from children themselves (as supposed to the opinions or observations of their parents or teachers) is essential in order to in understand their online experiences. Haider and Sundin (2022) argue that situatedness is not considered to the same extent in policy texts which relate to information literacy. Policy relating to information literacy needs to take the situated and contingent nature of digital experiences into account if it is to be effective in a digital age.

8.5 Limitations of the findings

This study achieved the objectives set out earlier in this thesis (see section 2.8.2): to employ methods which surfaced social, epistemic and corporeal aspects of shared digital reading including the material; to develop and employ innovative methods enabling children and their families to become active co-researchers and to generate new theory in relation to children's shared reading practices. However, the study was not without methodological limitations (see section 4.7) and the findings of this study present further limitations which are detailed here.

Firstly, the video data in this study presented snapshots and snippets of reading activities with only a few showing the activity running from beginning to end, although the interview data did go some way to compensating for this. These videos also represent one event at one moment in time and as situated and contingent practices, these reading activities

may have presented differently had a different event been captured on a different day. In relation, this video data likely represents the best days of the co-researchers' shared digital reading activities rather than their worst. This has implications for the use of the video data for theoretical sampling, in that there was no scope for differences or nuances to be drawn out by the researcher as only one set of videos was available.

The personal circumstances of the researcher meant that it was not possible to interview the extended family and teachers, although ethical approval to do this had been granted. It would be interesting to understand that experiences of the extended family and teachers in greater detail to understand alternative viewpoints, perspectives and motivations.

The timescale of the research and the researcher's status as a part-time PhD student and registered carer coupled with the pandemic context detailed in this thesis (see section 4.7.2) meant that it was not possible to share all findings with co-researchers. Although children were asked about their video data at interview, ideally the initial categories would have been shared with the child co-researchers. There is also a need to find creative ways of sharing this data with co-researchers in an accessible form during the data collection and analysis period. Using accessible forms of information to create greater participation from child co-researchers remains as a further challenge.

8.6 Recommendations for future research

Finding ways to communicate research to a wider group of potential child co-researchers in an appealing and relatable way is a key focus for future research. There are also questions about how to conduct ethical and responsible research whilst ceding even greater data collection responsibilities to co-researchers so that they can represent their perspectives.

This study emphasised how parents in these practices exerted a form of soft power to foreground certain ways of reading and to shape information landscapes. Understanding their point of view, particularly the parents who actively customised these practices, could provide

valuable insight into parental attitudes towards reading, their children's digital activities and children's digital reading. Additionally, understanding grandparents' perspectives on reading with a focus on the temporal nature of shared reading activities would be a fruitful area of future research. Furthermore, the evidence of socially and historically shaped reading activities, and as highlighted in the literature review, suggests that examining the cultural contexts of reading in different countries would be a rich area of future research. The findings of this research also emphasise how meaning is made through the body and this could be a further area of research through making use of work on Voice and Performance Studies.

Theoretically it would be interesting to explore the concept of consent in relation to children and young people in a society which requests people's consent frequently particularly in digital settings. In this thesis consent is considered in light of the following: that children are not subject to universal developmental levels; that literacy, learning and knowledge are not something which are 'out there' (Feldman and Orlikowski, 2011 p. 1243) to be absorbed by an individual; and that that agency is not something which one has (Barad, 1996 p. 183) rather it is something which is made in the moment as and as a result of the conditions of the practice. This throws up questions about how consent processes are created and when consent can be considered to have been given. This would be an area to explore through further study, both in terms of research methodologies to benefit the academy and in terms of the academic exploration of how consent is sought from young people in digital settings in relation to their information literacy practice.

Lastly the study of paratexts, through a practice perspective and as a source of information literacy is an area which warrants further research. Further research into the forms paratexts take, for example as visual or aural rather than textual, could benefit the study of reading and information literacy practices particularly in digital settings. Comprehensive work on how paratexts function as social, epistemic and corporeal modalities

of information in the Information Studies field and applied to a range of different research areas could add a valuable layer of understanding to information literacy practice. In reading research, employing a practice perspective could further researchers understanding of the reception of texts particularly in complex digital reading settings. Lastly asserting the importance of paratexts and how information is framed could also be explored in Information Studies research and beyond to bring this valuable concept to a wider scholarly audience.

8.7 Chapter conclusion

This chapter has outlined the theoretical, methodological and societal contributions that the research makes. It explores how cross-pollinating ideas from Information Studies, Publishing Studies and reading research can produce a nuanced account of children's shared digital reading which highlights how affect and emotion provide a driving force in the information literacy practice behind the reading activity. It unpacks how using constructivist grounded theory and video methods contributed to methodological innovation along with the information and consent process. It presents the societal contributions which suggest that understanding how information is framed is a vital component of information literacy practice in an era of disinformation and posits how the ethics of consent could be considered in non-academic settings and how understanding information literacy practices in digital settings as situated and contextualised is important to policy makers. Lastly it explored the limitations of the findings before moving onto recommendations for future research.

Epilogue: a note on a peritext

This thesis is dedicated to my mother. During the pandemic and particularly the first and second lockdowns in March 2020 and January 2021, my family experienced many ways of reading across devices and formats: library storytelling sessions delivered online by Southwark Council; teachers reading picturebooks and uploading them online; listening to endless audiobooks and engaging with eBooks via various platforms. But it was my mother reading to my sons, and one son in particular, on a daily basis during the school closures of the December to March 2021 lockdown that drove me towards investigating this phenomenon.

I would listen to her voice reading *The Lion, The Witch and the Wardrobe, Jason and the Argonauts* and *Thor and his lightening hammer*, as I snatched the precious hour away from the never-ending childcare which characterised that time for me. That familiar voice, so reminiscent of my own childhood and so comforting in the time of uncertainty, became the background soundtrack to my race to finalise a research design, emailing with Daisy, the illustrator, about the latest spreads of the *Space Explorers* book, all the time wondering: 'is anyone else doing this?' Was it just us who had hit on this way of reading to provide enrichment for a bored child, to assuage the loneliness of a distanced grandparent and to create a window of respite for a shattered parent? Creating an open research design which

would allow families to talk not only about institutionally-led reading of this kind or digitally-recorded consumer content felt like a huge risk. If it was just us, the open question posed by the research might not have resonated with anyone. I was bolstered when my supervisor came across a BBC article on the subject (see Fig. 1) and thankfully the risk paid off: we weren't the only ones. Capturing that moment in time, presented here in this thesis, was an immense privilege and pleasure.

My mother died unexpectedly in February 2022 of a rare brain tumour. She was hospitalised through the omicron wave of the Covid-19 virus in the winter of 2021, where for periods of time we were prevented from seeing her in hospital under NHS guidelines. We could not have known that those daily reading sessions of the lockdown less than a year earlier, delivered through pages and pixels and screens, would become the last sustained amount of time we would spend together. My young sons' abiding memories of her are as the storyteller on screen, their memories of her bound together with certain books, digital platforms and devices and even the blanket on the big blue sofa in our house. Her memory has driven me on to complete this thesis and to dedicate it as an ever-loving tribute to her.

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APPENDIX 1

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Portable Magic: Books, Reading, Young Children and Devices. June 2021

Information sheet for Parent/Carer Co-Researchers

My name is Katharine Smales and I am inviting you to take in part in my research project: *Portable Magic: Books, Shared Reading, Young Children and Devices.* I worked in children's publishing for over ten years and I am now PhD researcher at the Centre for Publishing, Department of Information Studies, UCL. My research is funded by the AHRC (Arts and Humanities Research Council) London Arts and Humanities Partnership and the Centre for Publishing, UCL. The UCL Department of Information Studies is an international centre for knowledge creation and transfer in the fields of librarianship, archives and records management, publishing, information science and digital humanities. It is situated in the Arts and Humanities Faculty at UCL, which was ranked 5th in the Times Higher Education World University Rankings (2021) and is recognised globally for research excellence.

I'm recruiting parent and child co-researchers to help me understand how children have been sharing books and stories with others, using digital technology, in the last year or so.

I've shared an eBook version of a picturebook which explains what my research is about and what being a co-researcher means. You can ask me if you have any questions about it. You can also ask me to send you a physical copy of this book to read with your child.

This information sheet will try and answer any questions you might have about the project, but please don't hesitate to contact me if there is anything else you would like to know. Please talk to your child and discuss whether or not you would like to take part as co-researchers. If you do decide to join, please note that you and your child can withdraw from the process if either of you want to. When you are gathering information for the project if you notice your child is uncomfortable or does not want to take part, please do stop. You should feel free to ask your child if they want to do it and make it clear to them that they can drop out if they want to with no negative consequences.

Who is carrying out the research?

Katharine Smales supervised by Dr Samantha Rayner and Professor Annemaree Lloyd, UCL.

Why is this research being done?

This research aims to discover, catalogue and describe the ways that stories are read to children using digital technology. This is something which has happened more and more in the last year or so and I'm keen to hear about families' experiences. There are no right or wrong answers.

For example, your family might use a video link so someone can read with your child. Or your child might watch a livestream or pre-recorded video of someone reading aloud. Or listen to a story using a speaker or digital device like an ipod. Or using an app to record a story for a child.

I also know that there might be ways that your child shares books with other people that I haven't listed above. Maybe you've found your own way for your child(ren) to read with others using digital technology? I'd love to hear about it if you have.

Lots of reading research happens in schools or nursery settings, but research has shown that the home is an important place where children learn about books and reading, so my research focuses on the home.

Why am I being invited to take part?

I'm looking for twenty families who have at least one child aged between four and eight-years-old who would be happy to act as co-researchers and provide two short videos of their children engaged in shared reading using digital technology. I think that parents/carers and the children themselves understand what they do better than anyone else, so you will be providing an expert view which will help academics, librarians and publishers understand how this kind of reading happens. If you have more than one child and your other child(ren) would like to be involved or appear in the videos, they would be welcome. I've made provision for this on the consent form available if you choose to take part.

What will happen if I choose to take part?

You and your child will be asked to complete a consent form each and return it to me.

I will then get in touch with you to discuss the next steps.

I will ask you to send me one short video of your child engaged in a shared reading practice using technology.

I will also ask you and your child to make one short video where your child describes how someone reads to them and what things they need to make this happen. I will ask them to describe everything that they do and use.

I will ask you to send me these two videos by email. I will then arrange a time for an informal interview with you and your child so you can tell me more. I will audio record this interview. It will take about an hour. This interview will take place by video call or in person. You are free to choose whether you would prefer the interview to take place in person or by video call and we can discuss this if you like. If we do conduct the interview in person, I will follow all government guidance on social distancing.

The interview will be an informal chat where I will ask you all about the videos. I will ask you to describe everything that is happening in the videos to me and I will ask you to explain some of the details of the way the reading happened to me. I will make a transcript of this interview and send it to you to check that I have transcribed what you said correctly.

Will anyone know I have been involved?

No. All the information that we collect about you during the course of this research will be kept strictly confidential. You and your child will not be identified in any of the ensuing reports or publications.

You and your child will choose pseudonyms (see child's information picturebook) and these will be used to store any information you send me on the UCL secure server. I will use the first name and first initial of this pseudonym when I write about you and your child in my research and when I store any data, including the videos and audio recording of the interview. If there is any information in the interviews which might identify

you or your child, I will remove it at transcription stage. I will store your email address on a secure UCL server separately from the video footage and audio recordings.

After my research is over, the videos, audio recording and transcripts will be archived, indefinitely, at a secure digital repository in the UK. When this happens the faces of anyone, including children, appearing in the video footage (and any other identifying information) will be blurred out. Other genuine researchers can make a request to see this footage. No other use will be made of these recordings without your written permission.

Only my supervisors and examiners will see the data without the faces blurred out and it will be sent to them securely using encrypted files and passwords. If I present my findings in a journal or at a conference all faces (and any other identifying information) will be blurred out and pseudonyms used.

If other people are recorded in the videos, please tell them that they are being filmed and ask their permission for you to do so. Please then tell me about this and I will contact them to ask for their consent to be part of the research. If they do not wish to be included their faces will be blurred out of the video footage and anything they say will be discounted. Later, when the footage is stored, their faces will be blurred out along with all other participants faces. If your child is watching a video or a live stream where the person reading has made that content freely available to the public you do not need to ask for their consent.

Please note that confidentiality will be maintained as far as is possible, unless during our conversation I hear anything which makes me worried that someone might be in danger of harm. In this case I might have to inform relevant agencies of this.

Could there be problems for me if I take part?

I have tried to design this research so that you can choose what video recordings you send me and so that if you or your child doesn't want to take part it is easy for you to stop recording.

You or your child may change your mind about taking part at some point during the making of the videos or during the interview. It is fine if you or your child wish to withdraw from the research and you should stop if you child does not want to participate. If you notice that your child is uncomfortable or doesn't want to participate, it is fine to tell me this on their behalf and either stop for a bit or to withdraw from the research completely.

You can withdraw from the research up to two months after you have seen the interview transcript and I will delete the videos and audio recordings.

What are the benefits of taking part?

There are no immediate benefits of taking part in this research, but it would be a chance for you and your family to show how your child(ren) have been reading with others in the last year or so to people who are really interested in this area of research. I have also tried to design this research so that it is engaging and fun for your child and you and I hope it will be an enjoyable experience.

What is something goes wrong?

You can email me or contact my supervisors: Dr Samantha Rayner and Prof Annemaree Lloyd, Department of Information Studies, University College London, Gower Street, London xxxxxxxx

If you do not feel your complaint has been handled to your satisfaction you can contact the Chair of the UCL Research Ethics Committee at ethics@ucl.ac.uk.

What will happen to the results of the research?

The results of this research will be shared with my supervisors and presented in my PhD thesis. This will be examined by an external examiner and the video data and audio recordings may be securely shared with them. I may also write about my research in academic journals and present the research at academic conferences. As stated previously, pseudonyms will be used and all faces (and any other identifying information) will be blurred out. If you would like to see any of the results of my research or read my thesis, I would be happy to share it with you.

Do I have to take part?

It is entirely up to you whether or not you choose to take part. I hope that if you do choose to be involved then you will find it a valuable experience. There will be no negative repercussions if you chose not to take part.

Data Protection Privacy Notice

The controller for this project will be University College London (UCL). The UCL Data Protection Officer provides oversight of UCL activities involving the processing of personal data, and can be contacted at data-protection@ucl.ac.uk

This 'local' privacy notice sets out the information that applies to this particular study. Further information on how UCL uses participant information can be found in our 'general' privacy notice:

For participants in research studies, click here

The information that is required to be provided to participants under data protection legislation (GDPR and DPA 2018) is provided across both the 'local' and 'general' privacy notices.

The lawful basis that will be used to process your personal data is: 'Public task' for personal data.

Your personal data will be processed so long as it is required for the research project. If we are able to anonymise or pseudonymise the personal data you provide we will undertake this, and will endeavour to minimise the processing of personal data wherever possible.

If you are concerned about how your personal data is being processed, or if you would like to contact us about your rights, please contact UCL in the first instance at data-protection@ucl.ac.uk.

Contact for further information:

If you have any further questions before you decide whether to take part, you can reach me at xxxxx

If you would like to be involved, please complete the following consent form and return to xxxxxx

I am DBS checked. This project has been reviewed and approved by the UCL Research Ethics Committee. The project ID is 20649/001. If you have any questions about the above research project, wish to exercise your rights as a research participant, or wish to make a complaint, please send an email with details to the Research Ethics Committee on ioe.researchethics@ucl.ac.uk so that we can look into the issue and respond to you. You can also contact the UCL Research Ethics Committee by telephoning xxxxxx

Thank you very much for taking the time to read this information sheet.

APPENDIX 2

Consent Form for Parents/Carers and their children to participate as co-researchers.

Title of research: Portable Magic: Books, Reading, Young Children and Devices.

Name and contact details of the Researcher: Katharine Smales xxxxxxx

Name and contact details of Principal Researcher: Dr Samantha Rayner xxxxxx

Contact details for the UCL Data Protection Office: data-protection@ucl.ac.uk

This study has been approved by the UCL Research Ethics Committee: Project ID number: 20649/001

Thank you for considering taking part in this research. The person organising the research must explain the project to you before you agree to take part. If you have any questions arising from the Information Sheet or explanation already given to you, please ask the researcher before you decide whether to join in. You will be given a copy of this Consent Form to keep and refer to at any time.

Please complete this form after you have read the information provided for you and your child. If you are happy to participate in this study, please complete this consent form and return to Katharine Smales by email or the address given in the information provided.

I confirm that I understand that by ticking/initialling each box below I am consenting to this element of the study. I understand that it will be assumed that unticked/initialled boxes means that I DO NOT consent to that part of the study. I understand that by not giving consent for any one element that I may be deemed ineligible for the study.

		Tick Box
1.	I confirm that I have read and understood the information sheet and picture book for the above study. I have had an opportunity to consider the information and what will be expected of me and my child. I have also had the opportunity to ask questions which have been answered to my satisfaction and would like my child and myself to take part in (please tick one or more of the following) - creating two short pieces of video footage. - a joint interview	
2.	I understand that I will be able to withdraw my data up to two months after the interview transcripts have been sent to me for checking.	
3.	I consent to participate in the study and give consent for my child(ren) to participate too. I understand that my personal information including my email address, video footage and audio recordings will be used for the purposes explained to me. I understand that according to data protection legislation, 'public task' will be the lawful basis for processing.	
4.	**Use of the information for this project only** I understand that all personal information will remain confidential and that all efforts will be made to ensure my child(ren) and I cannot be identified.	

	I understand that data gathered in this study will be stored securely and using pseudonyms. It will not be possible to identify me or my child(ren) in any publications.	
5.	I understand that my information may be subject to review by responsible individuals from the University (to include sponsors and funders) for monitoring and audit purposes.	
6.	I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I and my child(ren) are free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason or my legal rights being affected. I understand that if I decide to withdraw, any personal data I have provided up to that point will be deleted unless I agree otherwise.	
7.	No promise or guarantee of benefits have been made to encourage you or your child(ren) to participate.	
8.	I understand that the data will not be made available to any commercial organisations but is solely the responsibility of the researcher(s) undertaking this study.	
9.	I understand that I will not benefit financially from this study or from any possible outcome it may result in in the future.	
10.	I understand that the information I have submitted will be published as a PhD thesis and I wish to receive a copy of it. Yes/No	
11.	I consent to my interview being audio recorded and understand that the recordings will be: - Stored pseudononymously, using password-protected encrypted software and will be used for training, quality control, audit and specific research purposes. I consent to creating and sending the researcher two videos of my child(ren) taking part in the reading practices described. I understand that these videos will be: - Stored pseudononymously, using password-protected encrypted software and will be used for training, quality control, audit and specific research purposes.	
12.	I hereby confirm that I understand the inclusion criteria as detailed in the Information Sheet and explained to me by the researcher.	
13.	I have informed the researcher of any other research in which I am currently involved or have been involved in during the past 12 months.	
14.	I am aware of who I should contact if I wish to lodge a complaint.	
15.	I voluntarily agree to take part in this study.	
16.	Use of information for this project and beyond I would be happy for the data I provide to be securely stored on the UCL secure server and later on the secure UK Data Service server.	
17.	I understand that if another family member or private individual appears in the videos that I will need to let them know that they are being filmed and ask for their verbal consent. I will also let Katharine Smales know that I have asked for their consent and send on consent forms to them if necessary.	
18.	**Overseas Transfer of Data** I understand that my personal data will not be transferred overseas.	

_____ _____ _____

Name of participant Date Signature

APPENDIX 3

UCL Centre for Publishing, Department of Information Studies, University College London, Gower Street, London WC1E 6BT

Portable Magic: Books, Reading, Young Children and Devices. June 2021 – December 2022.

Information sheet for third party participants

My name is Katharine Smales and I'm a PhD researcher at the Centre for Publishing my research project: *Portable Magic: Books, Shared Reading, Young Children and Devices.* I worked in children's publishing for over ten years and I am now PhD researcher at the Centre for Publishing, Department of Information Studies, UCL. The UCL Department of Information Studies is an international centre for knowledge creation and transfer in the fields of librarianship, archives and records management, publishing, information science and digital humanities. It is situated in the Arts and Humanities Faculty at UCL, which was ranked 5th in the Times Higher Education World University Rankings (2021) and is recognised globally for research excellence. My research is funded by the AHRC (Arts and Humanities Research Council) London Arts and Humanities Partnership and the Centre for Publishing, UCL.

Why am I being contacted?

Your details have been passed to me because you were present (either online or in person) recently with one of the families who are part of my study. The parent or carer in the family will have asked you for your permission to be recorded at that time and let you know that I would get in touch with you. I'm following up on that. I'm contacting you to ask if you are happy for me to use the video footage which you appeared in as part of my research.

This information sheet will try and answer any questions you might have about the project, but please don't hesitate to contact me if there is anything else you would like to know. If you do decide to join, please note that you can withdraw from the process if you want to.

Who is carrying out the research?

Katharine Smales supervised by Dr Samantha Rayner and Professor Annemaree Lloyd, UCL.

Why is this research being done?

This research aims to discover, catalogue and describe the ways that people read stories to children using digital technology. This is something which has happened more and more in the last year or so and I'm keen to hear about people's experiences. There are no right or wrong answers, I'm just trying to understand how families do this.

For example, a family might use a video link so someone can read with a child. Or a child might watch a livestream or pre-recorded video of someone reading aloud. Or listen to a story using a speaker or digital device like an ipod. Or use an app to record a story for a child. I'm interested in all these ways of reading.

Lots of reading research happens in schools or nursery settings, but research has shown that the home is an important place where children learn about books and reading, so my research focuses on the home.

If you are happy to consent to the footage of your being used you will be helping academics, librarians and publishers understand how this kind of reading happens.

What will happen if I choose to take part?

I will ask you to review the video footage which accompanies this form and to read this information sheet. There is also a consent form attached. You are free to decide if you would like to consent or not. If you leave a box blank on the consent form then I will assume that you have not consented.

If you do not want the footage where you appeared to be used, that is fine. If this is the case, footage of you and any identifying information, including your face, will be blurred out of footage and anonymised in all transcripts, records, write ups and dissemination.

If you are happy for your footage to be used, it will become part of the information I collect for my research about how families have been using digital technology to read with young children.

Will anyone know I have been involved?

No. All the information that we collect about you during the course of this research will be kept strictly confidential. You will not be identified in any of the ensuing reports or publications.

You will be given a pseudonym and this will be used to store the video footage on the UCL secure server. Only my supervisors and examiners will see the data it will be sent to them securely using encrypted files and passwords.

I will use your pseudonym if I write about you in my research or if I talk about the research at a conference or write a research paper about it.

After my research is over, the videos will be archived at a secure digital repository in the UK. When this happens any identifying information in the videos, including your face, will be blurred out. Other genuine researchers can make a request to see this footage.

Please note that confidentiality will be maintained as far as is possible, unless I see anything in the video footage which makes me worried that someone might be in danger of harm. In this case I might have to inform relevant agencies of this.

Could there be problems for me if I take part?

You may change your mind about taking part at some point, this is fine. You can withdraw from the research up to two months after you have sent back your consent form and any identifying information will be blurred out of footage and anonymised in all transcripts, records, write ups and dissemination.

What are the benefits of taking part?

There are no immediate benefits of taking part in this research, but it would be a chance for you to show how children have been reading with others using digital technology in the last year or so to people who are really interested in this area of research.

What is something goes wrong?

You can email me or contact my supervisors: Dr Samantha Rayner and Prof Annemaree Lloyd, Department of Information Studies, University College London, Gower Street, London xxxxxxx

If you do not feel your complaint has been handled to your satisfaction you can contact the Chair of the UCL Research Ethics Committee at ethics@ucl.ac.uk.

What will happen to the results of the research?

The results of this research will be shared with my supervisors and presented in my PhD thesis. This will be examined by an external examiner and the video data may be securely shared with them. I may also write about my research in academic journals and present the research at academic conferences. When that happens pseudonyms will be used and any other identifying information, including your face, will be blurred out of the video footage. If you would like to see any of the results of my research or read my thesis, I would be happy to share it with you.

Do I have to take part?

It is entirely up to you whether or not you choose to take part. I hope that if you do choose to be, but there will be no negative repercussions if you chose not to.

Data Protection Privacy Notice

The controller for this project will be University College London (UCL). The UCL Data Protection Officer provides oversight of UCL activities involving the processing of personal data, and can be contacted at data-protection@ucl.ac.uk

This 'local' privacy notice sets out the information that applies to this particular study. Further information on how UCL uses participant information can be found in our 'general' privacy notice:

For participants in research studies, click here

The information that is required to be provided to participants under data protection legislation (GDPR and DPA 2018) is provided across both the 'local' and 'general' privacy notices.

The lawful basis that will be used to process your personal data is: 'Public task' for personal data.

Your personal data will be processed so long as it is required for the research project. If we are able to anonymise or pseudonymise the personal data you provide we will undertake this, and will endeavour to minimise the processing of personal data wherever possible.

If you are concerned about how your personal data is being processed, or if you would like to contact us about your rights, please contact UCL in the first instance at data-protection@ucl.ac.uk.

Contact for further information:

If you have any further questions before you decide whether to take part, you can reach me at xxxxxxx

If you would like to be involved, please complete the following consent form and return to xxxxxxx by [date TBC].

This project has been reviewed and approved by the UCL Research Ethics Committee. The project ID is 20649/001. If you have any questions about the above research project, wish to exercise your rights as a research participant, or wish to make a complaint, please send an email with details to the Research Ethics Committee on ioe.researchethics@ucl.ac.uk so that we can look into the issue and respond to you. You can also contact the UCL Research Ethics Committee by telephoning +44 (0)20 79115449

Thank you very much for taking the time to read this information sheet.

APPENDIX 4

Consent Form for Third Parties appearing in video footage

Title of research: Portable Magic: Books, Reading, Young Children and Devices.

Name and contact details of the Researcher: Katharine Smales xxxxxx

Name and contact details of Principal Researcher: Dr Samantha Rayner xxxxxx

Contact details for the UCL Data Protection Office: data-protection@ucl.ac.uk

This study has been approved by the UCL Research Ethics Committee: Project ID number: 20649/001.

Thank you for considering taking part in this research. The person organising the research must explain the project to you before you agree to take part. If you have any questions arising from the Information Sheet or explanation already given to you, please ask the researcher before you decide whether to join in. You will be given a copy of this Consent Form to keep and refer to at any time.

Please complete this form after you have read the information provided for you. If you are happy to participate in this study, please complete this consent form and return to Katharine Smales by email or the address given in the information provided.

I confirm that I understand that by ticking/initialling each box below I am consenting to this element of the study. I understand that it will be assumed that unticked/initialled boxes means that I DO NOT consent to that part of the study. I understand that by not giving consent for any one element that I may be deemed ineligible for the study.

		Tick Box
1.	I confirm that I have read and understood the information sheet for the above study. I have had an opportunity to consider the information and what will be expected of me. I have also had the opportunity to ask questions which have been answered to my satisfaction and would like to take part in (please tick one or more of the following) - Appearing in a short piece of video footage.	
2.	I understand that I will be able to withdraw my data up to two months after I have returned this form.	
3.	I consent to participate in the study. I understand that my personal information including the video footage will be used for the purposes explained to me. I understand that according to data protection legislation, 'public task' will be the lawful basis for processing.	
4.	**Use of the information for this project only** I understand that all personal information will remain confidential and that all efforts will be made to ensure that I cannot be identified. I understand that data gathered in this study will be stored securely and using pseudonyms. It will not be possible to identify me in any publications.	
5.	I understand that my information may be subject to review by responsible individuals from the University (to include sponsors and funders) for monitoring and audit purposes.	

6.	I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason or my legal rights being affected. I understand that if I decide to withdraw, any personal data I have provided up to that point will be deleted unless I agree otherwise.	
7.	No promise or guarantee of benefits have been made to encourage you to participate.	
8.	I understand that the data will not be made available to any commercial organisations but is solely the responsibility of the researcher(s) undertaking this study.	
9.	I understand that I will not benefit financially from this study or from any possible outcome it may result in in the future.	
10.	I understand that the information I have submitted will be published as a PhD thesis and I wish to receive a copy of it. Yes/No	
11.	I consent to the researcher using a piece of video footage in which I appear taking part in the reading practices described. I understand that these videos will be: - Stored pseudononymously, using password-protected encrypted software and will be used for training, quality control, audit and specific research purposes.	
12.	I hereby confirm that I understand the inclusion criteria as detailed in the Information Sheet and explained to me by the researcher.	
13.	I have informed the researcher of any other research in which I am currently involved or have been involved in during the past 12 months.	
14.	I am aware of who I should contact if I wish to lodge a complaint.	
15.	I voluntarily agree to take part in this study.	
16.	Use of information for this project and beyond I would be happy for the data I provide to be securely stored on the UCL secure server and later on the secure UK Data Service server.	
17.	**Overseas Transfer of Data** I understand that my personal data will not be transferred overseas.	

_____ _____ _____

Name of participant Date Signature

APPENDIX 5

Dear

Re: UCL Research Project 'Portable Magic: Books, Reading, Young Children and Devices.'

I'm writing to let you know about a research project that I am running into children's digital shared reading practices. I am hoping to recruit twenty parent and child co-researchers and I'm writing to ask you if you would consider putting some information about the project into your email newsletter or other parent communication.

I am a PhD researcher at the Centre for Publishing, Department of Information Studies, UCL. My research is funded by the AHRC (Arts and Humanities Research Council) London Arts and Humanities Partnership. Previous to this I worked in Children's Publishing for over ten years. I also teach the publishing module on the Children's Book Illustration MA at Goldsmiths College, University of London.

My research explores the ways that stories and books are read to children using digital technology in their homes. This is something which has happened more and more in the last year or so. Children may have been reading with a family member by video call or watching someone read them a book via livestream, social media or YouTube. They might have been using a particular app or a digital device to listen to stories. I'm keen to hear about families' experiences during this extraordinary year.

There is lots of academic research which compares digital to paper reading experiences, but not very much which explores reading practices which can't be categorised as either digital or physical, but are a mixture of both, which is the focus of my research. Lots of reading research happens in schools or nursery settings, but it's widely accepted that the home is an important place where children learn about books and reading, so my research focuses on the home.

I'm looking for twenty families who have at least one child aged between four and eight-years-old who would be happy to act as co-researchers for my study. I will ask the children and their parents to gather and send me information on how they read and ask them to take part in a short interview. I am asking them to do this because I think children and their families understand how they do things better than anyone else. I hope that as well as providing valuable insights for academics, librarians, educational professionals and publishers, this research will also be a rewarding way for families to document how they have shared books and stories, using technology in the last year or so and for children to learn about the research process.

If you felt it would be appropriate, I would like to put a short paragraph about my research into your email communcation to parents. This paragraph would include a link to a secure page where anyone who is interested in becoming a co-researcher can register and find out more information about potentially taking part.

The paragraph would read as follows:

How have your children been sharing books and stories with other people in the last year using digital technology?

Maybe your child has been reading with a family member by video call or watching someone read them a book via livestream, social media or YouTube? Or maybe you've been using a particular app or a digital device for sharing stories?

Katharine Smales, a PhD researcher at UCL's Centre for Publishing, is running a study about how children and their families having been sharing books and stories using digital technology. She's looking for families with at least one child aged between 4 – 8 years old to be co-researchers to help document how children have been reading during this extraordinary year.

If you are interested in finding out more or taking part, please click the secure link below for more information and to preview a children's book designed for children and their parents to explain what a co-researcher does.

https://redcap.link/uclspacexplorers

I'm DBS checked, my research has been approved by the UCL Research Ethics Committee (project ID 20649/001). I have completed UCL's GDPR and Data Protection training for researchers and I have obtained approval from the UCL Data Protection Officer, stating that the research project is compliant with the General Data Protection Regulation 2018. My supervisors are Dr Samantha Rayner and Professor Annemaree Lloyd.

Please let me know if you would be happy to include this information in your newsletter. If you would like any other information about the project, please do not hesitate to contact me on the email address below.

Yours sincerely,

Katharine

Katharine Smales
PhD Candidate
Department of Information Studies
University College London

xxxxx

APPENDIX 6

Text 1:

Katharine Smales, PhD Researcher at UCL's Centre for Publishing, funded by the AHRC London Arts and Humanities Partnership, is running a study about how families have found ways for their children to share books and stories with other people in the last year, using digital technology.

Maybe your child has been reading with a family member by video call or watching someone read them a book via livestream, social media or YouTube? Or maybe you've been using a particular app or a digital device for sharing stories?

She's looking for families, with at least one child aged between 4 and 8-years-old, to be co-researchers. If you are interested, please click the secure link below for more information about the project, including a picture book designed for children and their parents to explain what a co-researcher does.

https://redcap.link/uclspacexplorers

Text 2:

How have your children been sharing books and stories with other people in the last year using digital technology?

Maybe your child has been reading with a family member by video call or watching someone read them a book via livestream, social media or YouTube? Or maybe you've been using a particular app or a digital device for sharing stories?

Katharine Smales, a PhD researcher at UCL's Centre for Publishing, funded by the AHRC London Arts and Humanities Partnership, is running a study about how children and their families having been sharing books and stories using digital technology. She's looking for families with at least one child aged between 4 – 8 years old to be co-researchers to help document how children have been reading during this extraordinary year.

If you are interested in finding out more or taking part, please click the secure link below for more information and to preview a children's book designed for children and their parents to explain what a co-researcher does.

https://redcap.link/uclspacexplorers

APPENDIX 7

Information book for children and their parents/carers

Below is a preview of a picture book which is designed for children and their parents/carers to provide information about the project and what being a co-researcher means. Please take a look.

If you think your family might be interested in becoming co-researchers, you can register below and I'll send you a paperback copy of this book so you can decide together, and in your own time, if you would like to join.

https://heyzine.com/flip-book/8b54a2d60d.html

Information for parents/carers

There is also more detailed information, just for parents and carers available, which you can see here. [link to parent/carer information sheet]

If you would like to receive an information pack, including a paperback copy of the book to share with your child(ren), please leave your email address here:

https://redcap.link/uclspacexplorers

APPENDIX 8

Interview Topic Guide: Books, Shared Reading, Young Children and Devices.

Interviewers copy.

Participants will be briefing using the information book and verbally

before the research begins.

General notes:

• Video data will be used as a prompt for discussion in semi-structured interviews with parents and children.

• Depending on the age of the child who is present, the researcher anticipates that it may be necessary to switch to an unstructured interview in which topics are explored in a more natural way.

• It is probable that not all of these topics will be explored but some focused on more than others depending on the age of the child and the type of reading practice being discussed.

• This interview topic sheet is left deliberately open to avoid silencing co-researchers and placing boundaries on the study by limiting it's scope too tightly (Bryman, 2016).

• Children and parents will be thanked for their participation, reminded of their right to stop the interview at anytime if they wish to ahead of questions. They will also be reminded that they will be audio recorded and their permission re-sought.

Topical questions which will follow a general discussion of the reading practice captured in video footage.

First questions as ice breakers:

How are you today? What have you been doing this morning/afternoon?

What was it like making the video?

The place:

Can you tell me about the place where you read?

Where is the person who is reading to you?

What are the most important things here?

Do you ever read like this anywhere else? Can you tell me about that?

The people:

Who was reading?

Who was listening?

Can you talk to the person who is reading to you?

If yes: Did you talk about the book/story together? What did you talk about?

Can you see the person who is reading to you?

Was anyone else there when you were reading?

Where were they? Why were they there?

What were they doing?

Things:

What things did you use to read?

Can you tell me what they are for?

Can you tell me how they work?

The book/story:

What was the book/story like?

Did you enjoy it?

Why? (what was the best/worst bit, favourite character etc depending on answer above).

Who chose the book/story?

Why was it chosen?

Did the book have pictures?

Did the book have music?

Can you describe them?