Primary Children's Understanding and Relationship with Cartoon Characters:

A Critical Investigation and

Multimodal Suggestions

Robert Attard

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Abstract

This study aims at understanding how primary children understand and relate to cartoon characters. In order to reach these aims, a mixed methods approach was adopted, in which nine/ ten-year-old primary children were provided with an opportunity to participate in activities related with cartoon characters. In these activities the children expressed their understanding and relationships with cartoon characters through questionnaires, drawings, writings, and verbally during informal interviews and cartoon watching. Thematic analysis was used to analyse the children"s expressions. This analysis demonstrated the different ways in which the children understand and relate to animated cartoon characters. Moreover, it indicates how the students represent their understanding and relationships with these characters. From this analysis, suggestions were then derived for primary educators as ideas of how they can include cartoon characters in their teaching. These pedagogical suggestions based on the children"s expressions, can be adapted and used by educators to provide their students with educational experiences based on the students" interests for more effective learning.

Keywords:

Primary Education   Cartoon Characters   Children"s Expressions

Multimodality   Pedagogical Suggestions

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Chapter 1 – Introduction

Animated cartoons formed a significant part of my childhood. I used to delve into the imaginary animated worlds, broadening my imagination and inspiring myself from the characters that these cartoons portray. The experiences which the cartoon characters passed through provided me with an insight about different life situations and ways in which one might deal with them. For instance, the characters from Dragon Ball Z (Nishio & Yamauchi, 1989) and Naruto (Date, 2002) suggest that perseverance, dedication and companionship can lead to the resolution of challenges and the realisation of dreams. The animated characters" attitudes, motivation, and determination help them overcome challenges in an inspirational way. This inspired me to become diligent, hard-working and dedicated in my work. Furthermore, I feel that they helped me to reflect on what truly matters in life, such as the importance of family, friendships, health and ambition.

Nowadays, I still enjoy watching animated cartoons as I continue to learn about and familiarise myself with the characters, scenes, contexts and cultures found within them. Based on my experience in primary schools as a student teacher, I noticed that most primary children are still fascinated by cartoons and wish to identify themselves as one of their favourite cartoon characters. I observed that most students had one or more cartoon characters on their school bags. Some examples of these cartoon characters included Marvel superheroes, Disney princesses, Mickey Mouse and Minnie Mouse and Tom and Jerry. The students also described to me their favourite cartoon characters and how they relate to these characters.

For example, a student told me that he is like Jerry the mouse from Tom and Jerry because he is smart just like him. Also, knowing that as an educator I can make use of cartoon characters to make the lessons more engaging and fun for the students, I wanted to explore how primary children understand and relate to these characters.

My experience, knowledge and relationship with cartoon characters, as well as primary children"s wish to identify themselves as one of their favourite animated characters have inspired me to carry out this research by asking:

1. How do primary children understand and relate to cartoon characters?
2. What teaching implications can primary school educators draw from children"s understanding of animated cartoons to create effective learning?

These questions will be answered in the different chapters with information based on research. A brief outline of each chapter is included hereafter. In the next chapter, (Chapter 2), I will critically review existing literature on this subject including the pros and cons of animated cartoons. I will also discuss arguments relating to cartoon characters" portrayal, how animated cartoons influence children, and types of relationships which children form with animated cartoon characters. Apart from this, I will be focusing on literature which describes how children understand and make meaning of cartoons and how animated cartoons can be used in education. In this chapter, I will also present arguments for the integration of animated cartoons into different curricular subjects, so that I will represent what the literature states regarding ways in which animated cartoon characters can be incorporated in lessons.

The third chapter will focus on the methodology adopted in this research project which will be discussed in detail. Apart from stating the aims and objectives of this research in this chapter, I will also explain the research design, the selection of school and participants, and the research instruments employed in this study. Apart from providing the rationale behind the methodology adopted, I will discuss what the pilot study and the actual study involved and the ethical principles adopted for conducting this research. At the end of the third chapter I will describe the data analysis methods by which the data collected in this study could be analysed.

In the fourth chapter, which is the Data Analysis chapter, I critically analyse the themes which I identified from the children‟s interpretations through the informal interviews which I transcribed and the field notes which I took during the data collection activities. In this chapter, I will answer the first research question of this study by analysing children‟s cartoon watching habits, the ways in which primary children understand and relate to animated cartoon characters, and the influence which these characters have on children.

The chapter which follows is the fifth chapter which deals with multimodal suggestions. In this chapter, I will answer the second research question by providing suggestions on the use of animated cartoon characters and related materials to educate children both during lessons at school and at home. These suggestions which I provided are based on the students‟ interpretations and interests which the students‟ expressed in this study. Educators can use the concepts behind these suggestions to teach different subjects to primary students of different ages.

In chapter 6, which is the conclusion, I will outline the general outcomes and conclusions originating from this research. I will also discuss some limitations which I encountered during this process and provide suggestions for future research which can be used by other researchers who would like to investigate further how primary children understand and relate to cartoon characters.

Chapter 2 – Literature Review

2. Outline

This literature review links the nature and portrayal of animated cartoon characters with the ways in which children understand and relate with these characters. In this chapter I will present what other researchers have stated in the literature regarding what constitute cartoons and animations, how animated cartoon characters are portrayed and the potential influences that these characters may have on children. Then I link this information with other research which highlights the pedagogical relevance of cartoons and their potential use for educational purposes.

2.1 Definitions of Cartoons and Animations

> "The term cartoon has become a ubiquitous name for anything animated but its origins come from print media and earlier types of illustration." (Dobson, 2009, p. 35).

Referring to cartoons as earlier types of illustration, some definitions describe cartoons as humour represented in the form of picture panels with accompanying text presented as speech bubbles or lines of dialogue (Dobson, 2009; Nilsen & Nilsen, 2000). One such definition of cartoons is provided by Nilsen and Nilsen (2000) who define cartoons in this way by stating that:

> "Cartoons are jokes told in a picture (drawing, painting, etc.) comprising one or only a few panels." (Nilsen and Nilsen, 2000, in Raskin and Ruch, 2008, p. 614)

The picture panels are single drawings or individual frames depicting a frozen movement, some of which serve to set up the punch line (Raskin & Ruch, 2008). These punch lines are part of the text of a cartoon that have a surprising incongruity which sometimes may be completely resolved to understand the joke (Raskin & Ruch, 2008).

Hempelmann and Samson (2008) use the term „punch line" in order to define cartoons as jokes, stating that:

> "Cartoons are understood as a humour-carrying visual / visual-verbal picture, containing at least one incongruity that is playfully resolvable in order to understand their punch line." (Hempelmann & Samson, 2008, p. 614)

This means that in order to understand the humour present in cartoons and to cognitively process the meaning being conveyed, one has to consider the interaction and the interplay of visual and verbal/ textual channels of communication present in them (Tsakona, 2009). Gee (2004) defines any set of practices that makes use of multiple channels of communication (e.g. images, speech, gestures, etc.) to communicate distinctive types of meanings as a *semiotic domain*. Therefore, as suggested by Tsakona (2009), cartoons can be considered as a specific kind of *semiotic domain* due to its recruitment of visual and verbal/ textual channels of communication in order to convey distinct meanings.

Despite that earlier cartoons were produced as printed illustrations on newspapers and comics (Dobson, 2009), modern cartoons included simulation of motion and sound (Barrier, 2003), apart from the visual and verbal/ textual channels of communication. According to Barrier (2003, p. 3), the visual channel is more important as "human beings are influenced much more by what they see than by what they hear".

In fact, Barrier (2003) states that apart from the introduction of sound, it was ultimately the improvement in drawing and animation that was the most significant in the transition from silent cartoons (cartoons without sound) to animated cartoons.

Figure 1 shows an example of a silent cartoon on the left: Felix the cat (Sullivan & Messmer, 1923) and an example of an animated cartoon on the right: Tom and Jerry (Hanna & Barbera, 1956).
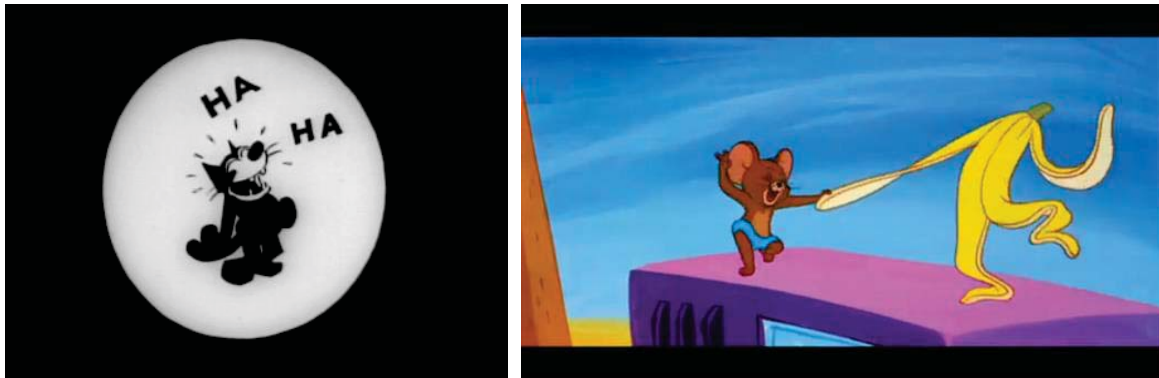
Figure 1. An example of a silent cartoon (left) and an animated cartoon (right).

Cel animation is animation which makes use of a "transparent substrate to create and film animated movement" (Dobson, 2009, p. 37). The development of this technology and technologies like computer animation production systems, and comuputer-generated imagery (Michelsen, 2009) facilitated the transition from silent cartoons to animated cartoons (Barrier, 2003). Animated cartoons therefore mark an improvement in the way that the visual channel of communication conveys meaning especially with regards to motion, because as defined by Philling (1997) in Dobson (2009), animated cartoons are:

> "Motion picture made from a series of drawings simulating motion by means of slight progressive changes." (Philling, 1997 in Dobson, 2009, p. xxxvi)

Considering the definitions of cartoons above, the term cartoons refers to both earlier cartoon illustrations, as well as modern cartoons in the form of animated films developed through the animation process (Dobson, 2009). Dirks (2019) defines animated films as

> "…ones in which individual drawings, paintings or illustrations are photographed frame by frame (stop-frame cinematography). Usually, each frame differs slightly from the one preceding it, giving the illusion of movement when frames are projected in rapid succession at 24 frames per second." (Dirks, 2019)

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Therefore, a more encompassing definition of cartoons needs to include both earlier and modern cartoons in the form of; political, social, topical, strip and animated film cartoons, as described by Jensen (1997). In fact, Jensen (1997) indicates that cartoons are works of art which translate humour into drawings, illustrations or animated films by giving colour, form and character to the most varied and imaginative sense of fable or reality itself.

Despite that animated cartoons are produced through the process of animation, there is a lack of a clear definition of the term animation, particularly due to the different meanings which animators and those viewing animations give to it (Dobson, 2009). The term animation originates from the Latin word, animatus, which means to give life to-, and most definitions of animation refer to it either as the process itself, or the art form separate from live-action film (Dobson, 2009). For instance, the definition of animation proposed by Blair (1994) in Wells (2002) refers to animation as the process:

> "Animation is the process of drawing and photographing a character – a person, an animal, or an inanimate object – in successive positions to create life-like movement." (Blair, 1994 in Wells, 2002, p. 3-4)

This definition of animation recognises the centrality of drawing in animation, however, it fails to describe approaches to animation facilitated by the new technologies including computer generated images and other types of pictorial manipulations (Wells, 2013). On the other hand, McClaren"s more precise definition of animation refers to animation as an art form and reads as follows:

> "Animation is not the art of drawings that move, but rather the art of movements that are drawn. What happens between each frame is more important than what happens on each frame." (Solomon, 1987, in Wells, 2013, p. 10)

This means that importance is given to the combined movement in the static panels or drawings to give life to the created drawings or illustrations (Dirks, 2019). Despite being more precise, this definition is still problematic as it implies that all films are actually a form of animation (Dobson, 2009). However, the scope behind animation is to give life to the inanimate (Dobson, 2009) and therefore does not include live action films in which real people or animals are filmed. Consequently another definition of animation found in Dobson (2009, p. xxxvi) which is provided by the Association of International Animated Film Association (ASIFA) states that animation is any film that is "not live action."

In agreement with Dobson (2009, p. xxxvi), animation in this study refers to all of these definitions such that it is acknowledged as an art form which is not a "live action film", in which motion is simulated and inanimate objects and characters brought to life. Moreover, this study refers to cartoons according to the more encompassing definition adapted from Jensen (1997). In this study, both the definitions of cartoons and animations are adopted from Dobson (2009) and Jensen (1997), however the main focus is on animated cartoons. The characteristic which distinguishes animated cartoons from other cartoons is the use of animation to give life to cartoon characters (Dobson, 2009).

2.2 Cartoon Characters' Portrayal

Barrier (2003, p. 4) defines cartoon characters based on their medium of creation by arguing that "what makes a cartoon character exactly that, a cartoon, can also make that character seem more real."

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Cartoon characters have been featured on animated cartoon channels such as Cartoon Network, Nickelodeon, Boing and in commercialised animated films, such as; Disney films, Warner Brothers films, Dream Works films, and Fox films (Ahmed & Wahab, 2014). Table 1a, 1b and Figure 2 show examples of cartoon characters as produced by various animated cartoon production companies. As suggested by Cooper-Chen (2012), the popularity of animated cartoons is dependent on regional factors rather than cultural proximity because for example, Doraemon (Fujio, 1969) is one of the favourite animated cartoons in Asia, but not in the West.

Animated cartoon production company	Cartoon Characters
Walt Disney Animation Studios	Mickey Mouse (Disney & Iwerks, Mickey Mouse, 1928), Goofy (Disney & Webb, 1932), Pluto (Disney, 1930), the 101 Dalmatians (Disney, 1961), Donald Duck (Disney, 1934), Disney princesses (Mooney)
Warner Bros.	Bugs Bunny (Avery, Clampett, Freleng, Tashlin, McKimson, & Jones, 1938-present), Road Runner (Jones & Maltese, Wile E. Coyote and the Road Runner, 1949), Wile E. Coyote (Jones & Maltese, Wile E. Coyote and the Road Runner, 1949), Daffy Duck (Avery & Clampett, 1937), Sylvester (Freleng, Sylvester, 1939), Tweety (Clampett & Freleng, 1941), Tasmanian Devil (McKimson, Tasmanian Devil, 1954)
Hanna-Barbera	Flintstones (Hanna & Barbera, The Flintstones, 1960), Scooby Doo (Hanna & Barbera, 1969-1970), The Smurfs (Hatchcock et al., 1981-1987)

Table 1a. Examples of cartoon characters as produced by various animated cartoon production companies.

Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer	Tom and Jerry (Hanna & Barbera, 1940-1958), Barney Bear (Ising, Gordon, Blair, Lah, & Lundy, 1939-1954)
Walter Lantz Productions	Woody Woodpecker (Lantz & Hardaway, 1940)
Zuiyo Ezio	L‟Ape Maia (Shiraume, 1975), Heidi (Takahata, 1974)
Nickelodeon Animation Studios	SpongeBob Squarepants (Drymon & Waller, 1999-2015)
Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer	Tom and Jerry (Hanna & Barbera, 1940-1958), Barney Bear (Ising, Gordon, Blair, Lah, & Lundy, 1939-1954)
Walter Lantz Productions	Woody Woodpecker (Lantz & Hardaway, 1940)
Zuiyo Ezio	L‟Ape Maia (Shiraume, 1975), Heidi (Takahata, 1974)
Nickelodeon Animation Studios	SpongeBob Squarepants (Drymon & Waller, 1999-2015)

Table 1b. More examples of cartoon characters as produced by various animated cartoon production companies.
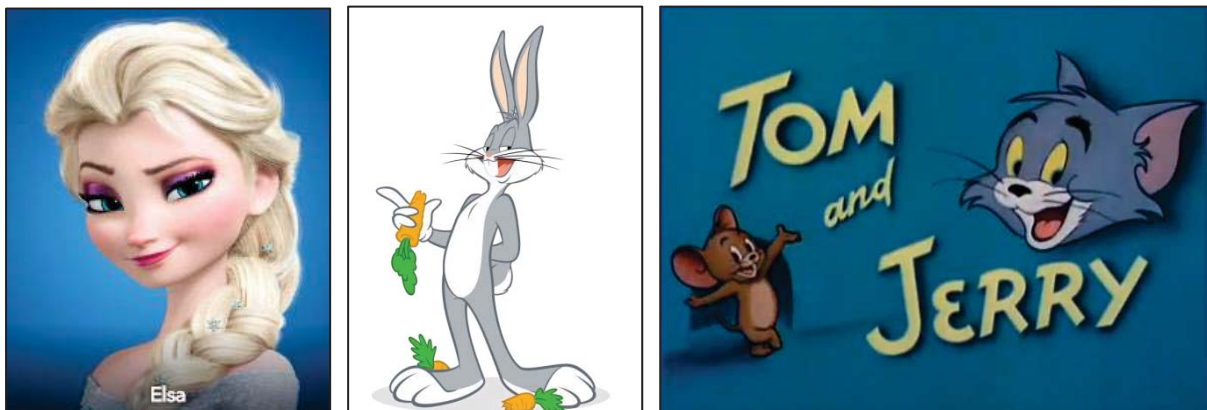
Figure 2. Examples of cartoon characters produced by various animated cartoon production companies.

In Figure 2, the cartoon characters represented from left to right are as follows: Elsa from Frozen (Buck & Lee, 2013) produced by Disney, Bugs Bunny produced by Warner Bros., and Tom and Jerry produced by Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Productions. The images in Figure 2 were retrieved from: https://characters.disney.com, https://www.wbkidsgo.com/en-ph/looneytunes/Bugs-Bunny, Screenshot: 00.09 - (Barbera & Hanna, 1948, Tom and Jerry: Kitty Foiled)

Since cartoon characters are able to represent diverse beings, personalities, entities and identities, Wells (2008) defines them as phenomena. In fact, Wells (2008) adds that:

> "At one and the same time, such characters can be beasts and humans, or neither; can prompt issues about gender, race and ethnicity, generation, and identity, or not; and can operate innocently or submersively, or as something else entirely." (Wells, 2008, p. 3)

Cartoon characters are drawn to possess human characteristics or attributes in a process known as anthropomorphism (Jardim, 2013). According to Wells (2008), anthropomorphism of animated cartoon characters allows animators to depict these performances of gender, sexuality, racial and national traits which challenge how we think about ourselves.

Otherwise, it would be difficult to address and portray these scenarios because of issues associated with political, social or religious taboos (Wells, 2008). On the other hand, other studies suggest that animated cartoons contain essentialist beliefs and that cartoon characters contain stereotypical portrayals (Harriger et al., 2018; Herhuth, 2017; Bazzini et al., 2010). Essentialism refers to "the view that categories have an underlying reality or true nature that one cannot observe directly but that gives an object its identity" (Gelman, 2003, p. 3).

It refers to the social categorisation of individuals or members of a group who are distinguished from other groups based on their similarity (essence) and by the belief of who is making the categorisation (Pereira, Estramiana, & Gallo, 2010). An example of essentialism in animated cartoons is represented in Figure 3 which shows Buzz Lightyear from Toy Story (Guggenheim, Arnold, & Lasseter, 1995; Time of Screenshot: 47.25) as he discovers his toy essence through his plastic body (Herhuth, 2017).

Figure 3 - Buzz Lightyear from Toy Story.

Strong essentialist beliefs can lead to prejudice which involves the formation of opinions about members of a group based on perceptions of intergroup differences (Rhodes & Mandalaywala, 2017; Pereira, Estramiana, & Gallo, 2010). Essentialism can also lead to stereotyping which involves making assumptions about category members who share particular traits (Rhodes & Mandalaywala, 2017). As Czopp (2008) argues, stereotypes can be both positive and negative.

For example, stating that women are weak is an example of a negative stereotype whereas stating that African Americans have a natural sense of rhythmic and musical ability is a positive stereotype (Czopp, 2008).

2.2.1 Negative Stereotypes portrayed by Animated Cartoon Characters

Stereotypes in animated cartoons have been reported in several studies (Harriger et al., 2018; Klein & Schiffman, 2006). The study by Hare (2018) suggests that female characters are still underrepresented when compared with male characters, whereas in the study by Klein and Schiffman (2009) only 0.3% of 603 characters studied represented LGBTIQ+ individuals. Apart from the unequal representation of gender in animated cartoons (Hare, 2018; Klein & Schiffman, 2009), gender in animated cartoons has also been subject to stereotyping (Harriger et al., 2018; England et al., 2011; Lacroix, 2004). Ahmed and Wahab (2014) argue that female characters in animated cartoons broadcasted on Cartoon Network have associated negative stereotypes such as being portrayed as physically weak and dependent on male characters who are positively depicted as strong, brave and intellegent.

Other studies argue that in animated cartoons such as Disney Princesses films, female characters like Ariel and Belle (Figures 4.1 & 4.2) are portrayed as thin, while male characters like Kristoff (Figure 4.3) are portrayed as mascular (Harriger et al., 2018; England et al., 2011; Lacroix, 2004). These gendered-stereotypes affect children‟s expectations of what women and men should be like (Ahmed & Wahab, 2014). Figures 4.1 & 4.2 were retrieved from: https://princess.disney.com, whilst Figure 4.3 was retrieved from: https://frozen.disney.com/kristoff.

| **Figure 4.1 – Ariel** | **Figure 4.2 – Belle** | **Figure 4.3 – Kristoff** |

Also, according to England et al. (2011), gendered-role portrayals create gendered expectations in children and can lead to their belief that these are socially accepted norms and behaviours. For example, England et al. (2011) and Lacroix (2004) note that princesses in Disney films are negatively portrayed and associated with traditional gender roles such as doing domestic work (Figure 5 - Geronimi, Jackson, & Luske, 1950, Cinderella; Time of Screenshot: 26.54).

Figure 5 – Cinderella washing the floor.

Gender issues have also been noted in recent animated films such as Frozen (Buck & Lee, 2013). In her study on Frozen (Buck & Lee, 2013), Dimech (2017) found that Anna, a female character, is portrayed as innocent and passive, whilst Kristoff a male character is positively portrayed as mature and protective (Dimech, 2017). However, according to Garabedian (2015), by incorporating two strong female leads - Anna and Elsa - who are independent of the male characters - Kristoff, Olaf and Sven - in Frozen (Buck & Lee, 2013), Disney shattered previous gender role limitations. This is also because Anna chose to protect her sister demonstrating that her love for her family was stronger than her love for a male lead (Garabedian, 2015). Hine, England, Lopreore, Horgan and Hartwell (2018) and Garabedian (2015) and England et al. (2011) agree that stereotypical gender representations were mostly portrayed in cartoons before the 1980s, and the cartoon characters portrayed afterwards displayed less stereotypical gender roles and behaviour.

Apart from gender stereotyping in animated cartoons, other studies have noted the promotion of cultural ideals with regards to the characters" appearance (Harriger et al., 2018; Bazzini et al., 2010). In animated cartoons produced by *all* of the major animation studios between the 1930s and the mid-1990s, Klein and Schiffman (2006) also noted that members of different races were being portrayed similarly, whilst the representation of racial minority groups has decreased in recent years.

Giroux (1999) and Lacroix (2004) agree that some of Disney‟s cartoon heroines portray „embodiments of ideological values‟. Lacroix (2004) and Giroux (1999) criticise Disney‟s representations of race, particularly for maintaining invisibility in the construction of Whiteness and for the orientilisation of women of colour in these films. Disney‟s construction of Whiteness is evident in The Jungle Book (Reitherman, 1967) where the apes sing to a Caucasian boy with African American voices "…I want to be like you" (Towbin, Haddock, Zimmerman, Lund, & Tanner, 2004, p. 36). Lacroix (2004) also argues that Disney‟s portrayal of characters with darker skin tones, like Jasmine and Pocahontas (Figures 6.1 & 6.2; retrieved from: https://princess.disney.com) retain many White features such as a delicate nose and small mouth.

Figure 6.1 – Jasmine   **Figure 6.2 – Pocahontas**

According to Lacroix (2004), the depiction of overly large almond-shaped eyes present in characters of colour like Jasmine, is the only signifier of racial difference apart from skin tone. Whereas race refers to difference in physical appearance, ethnicity refers to the self-identification with a group culture, identified based on language, religion, marriage patterns and real or imaginary origins (Bradby, 2012).

Animated cartoon characters also represent stereotypes regarding ethnicity (Keys, 2016; Lacroix, 2004). For example, accoridng to Lacroix (2004), the animated character Esmeralda in The Hunchback of Notredam reflects a particular stereotype of her ethnic background because of the dresses that she wears which bare her shoulders. Accoridng to Keys (2016), in the animated cartoon Dora the Explorer, Dora, a 7-year old girl, has physical features which are indicative of her Latino ethnicity. These physical features that indicate her Latino ethnicity include Dora"s brown eyes, dark brown straight hair and light brown skin (Keys, 2016).

Stereotypes regarding class are also featured in animated cartoons (Keys, 2016; Towbin et al., 2004). In the animated cartoon Dora the Explorer, the appearance of Dora"s home furnished with simple décor and her father"s occupation as a baseball team coach seem to indicate that Dora"s family is working-class (Keys, 2016). In Disney"s animated films, stereotypes regarding class include portrayals of the hyenas in The Lion King (Allers & Minkoff, 1994) which are portrayed as poor and hungry, suggesting that they belong to the working class (Towbin et al., 2004). On the other hand, the lions in The Lion King (Allers & Minkoff, 1994) represent the upper class as they have the power in their community (Towbin et al., 2004). Figure 7 shows one of the hyenas from The Lion King (Allers & Minkoff, 1994, The Lion King; Time of Screenshot: 27.44) which as a working-class serves Scar the lion who is upper-class because of his power in their community.

Figure 7. Screenshot from The Lion King.

Beauty and the Beast (Trousdale & Wise, 1991) also contains stereotypes with regards to class as the housewares promote the idea that the poor enjoy serving the rich by singing "Life is unnerving for a servant that"s not serving" (Towbin et al., 2004, p. 33).

Disney"s portrayals of older characters also seem to include stereotypical depictions (Robinson, Castiller, Magoffin, & Moore, 2007). Robinson et al. (2007) found that 42% of Disney"s older characters were portrayed either with physical impairments, canes, glasses, missing teeth, and wrinkles like grandma Fa (Figure 8.1 - Bancroft & Cook, 1998, Mulan; Time of Screenshot: 05.28), or as negative characters overall like the witch from Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs (Figure 8.2 - Cottrell et al., 1937, Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs; Time of Screenshot: 52.15).

Figure 8.1 – Grandma Fa   **Figure 8.2 – The Witch from Snow White**

Robinson et al. (2007) and Robinson and Anderson (2006) acknowledge that 58% of older characters in Disney and 62% of older characters in other animated cartoons broadcasted on Cartoon Network, Nickelodeon and other channels are portrayed as positive characters. For example in Mulan, grandma Fa (Figure 8.1) takes the positive role of a grandparent (Robinson & Anderson, 2006). However, the authors argue that some older characters are still portrayed in a negative manner and this might account for children"s negative perceptions of older people (Robinson et al., 2007).

Another social aspect which has been studied recently includes the portrayal of families in Disney films (Zurcher, Webb, & Robinson, 2018). Zurcher et al. (2018) found that 41% of the families portrayed in Disney films were single-parent families, 25% were portrayed as nuclear families, and 19% were portrayed as guardian families. The reason for this portrayal of families according to a Disney executive producer is because most of the Disney films are about growing up (Zurcher et al., 2018).

2.2.2 Positive Stereotypes portrayed by Animated Cartoon Characters

Towbin et al. (2004) acknowledges Disney for addressing such stereotypical images especially those regarding gender, race, ethnicity and class. For example, despite negative portrayal of families in Disney animated films, Zurcher et al. (2018) also note that in most of Disney‟s animated films, like Mulan (Bancroft & Cook, 1998) and The Incredibles (Bird, 2004), familial interactions were depicted as warm and supportive. Figure 9 shows an example of a warm familial depiction of Fa Zhou hugging his daughter Mulan (Bancroft & Cook, 1998, Mulan; Time of Screenshot: 1.19.35).

Figure 9 – Fa Zhou hugging his daughter Mulan.

Furthermore, Zurcher et al. (2018) found that 79% of Disney‟s animated films illustrated a positive relationship between the protagonist and his / her family. Also, in the Disney film Mulan (Bancroft & Cook, 1998) Asian culture is portrayed in a realistic and positive way (Towbin et al., 2004).

Other Disney movies such as The Hunchback of Notre Dame (Trousdale & Wise, 1996) and The Many Adventures of Winnie the Pooh (Lounsbery & Reitherman, 1977) convey positive messages that despite differences in appearance, characteristics, and values, people can create a community together (Towbin et al., 2004).

Animated cartoons were also reported of promoting the beauty-goodness stereotype (Bazzini et al., 2010; Klein & Schiffman, 2006). This is because characters which are portrayed as beautiful or physically attractive are also portrayed as morally good, performing acts which are intended to benefit other characters (Bazzini et al., 2010; Klein & Schiffman, 2006). On the other hand, ugly or unattractive characters are portrayed as morally bad and engaging in antisocial acts (Bazzini et al., 2010; Klein & Schiffman, 2006). Despite the promotion of the beauty-goodness stereotype, Bazzini et al. (2010) found that after watching a Disney animated film, children were unaffected in their evaluations of an attractive or an unattractive peer. These positive and negative stereotypes in animated cartoons represent a particular culture, one which values being attractive, young, strong and rich over being unattractive, old, physically weak or poor (Klein & Schiffman, 2006).

2.3 The Influence of Animated Cartoon Characters on Children

Apart from representing particular cultures and values, Lacroix (2004) and Giroux (1999) add that animated cartoons influence children‟s values, attitudes, beliefs, and behaviour. In his book "The Mouse That Roared: Disney and the End of Innocence", Giroux (1999) states that:

"The role that Disney plays in shaping individual identities and in controlling the fields of social meaning through which children negotiate the world is far more complex than simple reactionary politics. If educators and other cultural workers are to include the culture of children as an important site of contestation and struggle, then it is imperative to analyse how Disney"s animated films influence the way America"s cultural landscape is imagined." (Giroux, 1999, p. 91)

For this reason, several publications have criticised the way that animated cartoons narrate children"s culture (Zurcher et al., 2018; Bazzini et al., 2010). This is because children are immersed in the art of cartoons in their daily lives, from which they acquire an outlook on the world in which they make connections between imaginary and real, space and time, causes and consequences (Andrienko & Kulikovskaya, 2017). Children believe that cartoon characters, situations, and storylines are realistic. They assume that the reality that cartoons represent, including social norms, behaviours, and cultures, reflects social reality (Baker & Raney, 2007).

2.3.1 Negative Influences of Animated Cartoon Characters

The extent to which children consume media has increased over time, particularly due to advancement in technology and the development of the media industry (Marsh, 2014). Li, Boguszewski and Lillard (2015) and İvrendi and Özdemir (2010) indicate that on average children spend more than an hour daily watching cartoons. The animated cartoon characters which feature in children"s television shows, also feature in comics, cartoon channels, animated films, commercials, and market products (Hollis, 2015; Marsh, 2014).

Animated cartoon characters are also present on children"s clothing, stationary, lunchboxes, books, magazines, comics, toys, cards, and games (Dickie & Shuker, 2014; Marsh & Millard, 2000). Apart from this, cartoon characters form 27% of promotional characters which are used to promote food and beverages to children, as they are known to influence children"s diet and snack preferences (Gauci, Reiff, Knai, Gauci, & Spiteri, 2015; Kraak & Story, 2015; Henry & Story, 2009). Figure 10 shows an example of this which is described by Naderer, Matthes and Zeller (2018) who state that in one of the scenes in the animated film *The Smurfs* (Gosnell, 2011, The Smurfs; Time of Screenshot: 48.37), a smurf eats M&M"s chocolates and finds them to be tasty.

Figure 10. A smurf in the animated film The Smurfs.

In a study by Nwabueze and Okonkwo (2015), the authors describe the negative influence of the animated cartoon Ben 10 on children"s behaviour, particularly in their addiction to Ben 10 cartoons and merchandise and in their fighting with other children to imitate some of the characters" actions.

Other studies which include those by Wiedeman, Black, Dolle, Finney, and Coker (2015) and Murray (2008) have also addressed the negative influence on children‟s behaviour when they are exposed to violent and aggressive cartoons. Disney animated films also include aggression and violent behaviour as Gaston tries to kill the beast in Beauty and the Beast and in Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs, the wicked queen tries to poison Snow White with a poisoned apple (Coyne & Whitehead, 2008). Violence and aggression are also displayed in the animated cartoons Tom and Jerry (Hanna et al., 1940-1967), Road Runner (Jones & Maltese, Wile E. Coyote and the Road Runner, 1949), and Bugs Bunny (Avery, Clampett, Freleng, Tashlin, McKimson, & Jones, 1938-present) in which characters pose a credible threat and/ or use force intended to cause harm to the other characters (Muchmore, 2014). Figure 11 shows an example of an aggressive and violent behaviour as Elmer Fudd threatens to shoot Bugs Bunny (Jones C. M., 1953, Bugs Bunny: Duck! Rabbit, Duck! Time of Screenshot: 01.40).

Figure 11 – Elmer Fudd threatening to shoot Bugs Bunny.

According to Murray (2008), exposure to violent or aggressive cartoons, can negatively impact children‟s values, attitudes, and behaviour. Wiedeman et al. (2015) argue that factors such as the time spent viewing media, the content of the media, the child‟s age, and the child‟s psychological characteristics, can influence the impact of violent and aggressive media on children.

2.3.2 Positive influences of Animated Cartoon Characters

Contrary to the studies above which indicate the negative influences of animated cartoons on children, other studies like those by de Leeuw and van der Laan (2018) and Mares and Woodard (2005) suggest that animated cartoons can also have positive influences on children. One of these positive influences is that children are more likely to help their friends after watching a cartoon character helping a friend in a Disney animated film (de Leeuw & van der Laan, 2018).

Such positive influences on children were attributed to animated cartoon characters‟ prosocial behaviour (Mares & Woodard, 2005). Prosocial behaviour refers to voluntary behaviour exhibited by a character which is meant to benefit another character (Padilla-Walker, Coyne, Fraser, & Stockdale, 2013). Padilla-Walker et al. (2013) found high levels of prosocial behaviour in Disney animated films, such as Cars (de Leeuw & van der Laan, 2018), The Lion King (Allers & Minkoff, 1994), and The Incredibles (Padilla-Walker et al., 2013; Bird, 2004). Figure 12 shows Mr Incredible talking to the police after his prosocial acts in which he helped them catch a thief and saved the citizen‟s cat (Bird, 2004, The Incredibles; Time of Screenshot: 03.59).

Figure 12 – Mr Incredible saves citizen's cat and helps police catch a thief.

2.3.3 The Role of Parents and Guardians

In order to maximise the positive influences that animated cartoons have on children, Kirkorian, Wartella and Anderson (2008) suggest that producers should provide appropriate guidelines and that parents need to select well-designed and age-appropriate cartoons for their children. However, in today"s society, parents dedicate most of their time to work and spend less time monitoring the content of animated cartoons that their children watch (Habib & Soliman, 2015). In fact, Griggs, Tan, Buchanan, Attar-Schwartz, and Flouri (2010) indicate that for these reasons, grandparents are playing an increasingly significant role in children"s lives and well-being. Therefore, as suggested by Nwabueze and Okonkwo (2015), parents, grandparents and guardians have an important role as they should dedicate ample time to educate their children about differences between reality and what they watch on animated cartoons.

Furthermore, the moral messages that prosocial cartoons mediate can be strengthened by parents and guardians (de Leeuw & van der Laan, 2018). In doing so, by supporting their children"s acquisition of this morality from cartoons, parents can help their children be more prosocial (de Leeuw & van der Laan, 2018).

2.4 Children's Relationship with Cartoon Characters

When children perceive an animated cartoon character as being strongly prosocial (Padilla-Walker et al., 2013), they want to behave or be like the same character. This process of pretending to be or acting like a favourite media character is known as wishful identification (Hoffner & Buchanan, 2005; Hoffner, 1996). Moreover, the animated cartoon character"s prosocial behaviour intensifies the children"s relationship with the character as they feel stronger emotions towards it (Ramasubramanian & Kornfield, 2012). These emotional connections or imaginary relationships which viewers develop with media characters are known as parasocial relationships or interactions (Rosaen & Dibble, 2008).

Rosaen and Dibble (2008) state that although adults, adolescents and children form parasocial relationships with media characters, such a relationship is strongest in young children. Furthermore, children form emotional connections especially with animated cartoon characters who are similar to the children themselves (Jennings & Alper, 2016). In agreement with Gardner and Knowles (2008), these researchers found that parasocial interaction is positively associated with social realism. Social realism refers to the extent to which a media character or event is likely to occur in the real world (Rosaen & Dibble, 2008).

Therefore, children bond with characters that are more socially realistic, and in turn, when children demonstrate affection and love towards a particular character, this character is perceived as more real (Gardner & Knowles, 2008; Rosaen & Dibble, 2008).

Hoffner (1996) found that children‟s wishful identification and parasocial interaction with cartoon characters are dependent on the animated cartoon character‟s attractiveness, humour, intelligence, strength, and social behaviour, apart from its prosocial behaviour. Moreover, children‟s parasocial interaction and preference for media characters is also determined by sex (Jennings & Alper, 2016; Hoffner, 1996). In the study by Jennings and Alper (2016), 98% of the boys and 56% of the girls reported parasocial interaction with same-sex media characters as their friends and a similar ratio was obtained by Hoffner (1996). For example girls chose princesses as characters with which they formed a positive parasocial relationship (Jennings & Alper, 2016), whereas boys chose male characters as Leonardo and Rafael from Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles (Hoffner, 1996). Hoffner‟s (1996) findings suggest that wishful identification with male characters for boys was predicted by intelligence, whereas for girls it was predicted by humour.

Whereas in Jennings and Alper (2016)‟s study only one boy reported a female character as his friend, in Hoffner (1996)‟s study, only girls chose female characters, in which case, wishful identification was predicted by attractiveness (Hoffner, 1996). Together, the studies by Hoffner (1996) and Ramasubramanian and Kornfield (2012) suggest that both cartoon characters‟ physical characteristics as well as their social behaviours affect children‟s relationship with these characters.

When describing the positive influences of watching the emotions of animated characters as portrayed in different situations, Wilson (2008) points out that children can learn about the nature and causes of different emotions, and empathise with the characters. The empathy that children feel with animated characters results from their sensitivity and recognition of what emotion the animated character is feeling in a way that the children imagine themselves in the character"s place (Wilson, 2008; Paiva et al., 2005). Moreover, Wilson (2008) also suggests that children"s altruism, cooperation and tolerance for others increase when children are exposed to educational programmes and programmes intended for children, such as those broadcasted on Disney and Nickelodeon (Wilson, 2008). Altruism refers to the voluntary act of helping someone or sharing something intentionally, with the purpose of benefitting others beyond simple sociability or duties associated with role (Smith, et al., 2006).

When such altruistic behaviours are explicitly modelled by animated cartoon characters, children tend to choose to watch more prosocial content (de Leeuw & van der Laan, 2018; Mares & Woodard, 2005). In fact, it was found that both preschool and older children"s exposure to age-appropriate educational programs has associated benefits, such as the development of cognitive skills and better academic achievement (Kirkorian et al., 2008). On the other hand, apart from the negative behavioural and psychological influences (Wiedeman et al., 2015; Murray, 2008), children"s exposure to pure entertainment and violent content can result in poorer cognitive development and lower academic achievement (Kirkorian et al., 2008).

2.5 Children's Meaning Making of Cartoons

While children are watching cartoons, they acquire values, images, signs and symbols of culture (Andrienko & Kulikovskaya, 2017). Andrienko and Kulikovskaya (2017, p. 42) refer to the educational potential of cartoons as the "semiotic space of cinematography" as from it children are able to "decode the deeper meaning of values hidden in them". The authors explain that:

> "Like letters in an alphabet make it possible to understand words and their sense, these signs enable children to decode the deeper meaning of values hidden in them." (Andrienko & Kulikovskaya, 2017, p. 42)

The same authors conclude that it is the understanding of this language of signs from cartoons that feeds children‟s imagination and reveals to them the connections existing in the unity of values (beauty, love, morality, knowledge) which are especially important in the modern world (Andrienko & Kulikovskaya, 2017).

Veresov and Kulikovskaya (2015) agree with Andrienko and Kulikovskaya (2017) that the development of a world outlook in children‟s consciousness is related to the development of their thinking and imagination. Furthermore, these authors agree with Vygotsky (2004) that images of imagination, such as those found in cartoons, enrich the experience of a child for the development of his / her creativity and provide inner language for real feelings. Veresov and Kulikovskaya (2015) assert that:

> "Owing to research by Vygotsky, it was found out that a child distinguishes between imagination, fiction and reality quite well. However, living through and experiencing imagined, fantastic, pretended images allow enriching the world-view, formed in consciousness of a child." (Veresov and Kulikovskaya, 2015, p. 572)

Furthermore, Vygotsky"s sociocultural theory posits that learning occurs through social interaction with more knowledgeable others when the child is in the "Zone of Proximal Development" (Vygotsky, 1980, p. 131). Therefore, through sharing of interpretations and meanings derived from cartoons, children can learn and construct knowledge (Ajayi, 2011).

2.6 Cartoons and Animations in Education

Knowledge which children acquire from watching cartoons shapes ideas of their world outlook and this view of the world continues to evolve later throughout their educational experiences (Veresov & Kulikovskaya, 2015). In fact, as children watch cartoons, they engage in meaning-making from these digital texts which "serve as cultural tools that mediate their literacy learning" (Friedrich, Teichert, & Devadas, 2017, p. 22). Apart from improving their language competencies (Lodhi, Ibrar, Shamim, & Naz, 2018), by watching cartoons children also learn to work with multiple resources for meaning making. Lenters (2018) states that as children read texts with various channels of communication, like cartoons:

> "They learn to decode and encode information, their comprehension of often complex ideas is aided by the use of multiple sign systems, they learn about different ways information and story may be conveyed for different audiences, and they have the opportunity to critically engage with important topics." (Lenters, 2018, p. 645)

This enables children to learn how complex meanings can be conveyed through the interplay of channels of communication, such as visual, auditory, spatial, and gestural, rather than through spoken or written language alone (Lenters, 2018). Furthermore, Lenters (2018) suggests that when children work with these channels of communication, they become navigators, interpreters, and interrogators of texts.

Children‟s interpretations of texts like animated cartoons are dependent on each child‟s individual experiences (Veresov & Kulikovskaya, 2015; Ajayi, 2011).

As children understand animated cartoons as cultural and social materials which they can manipulate and interpret in particular ways, they develop critical literacy (Ajayi, 2011). Luke (2012, p. 5) defines critical literacy as the "use of the technologies of print and other media of communication to analyse, critique, and transform the norms, rule systems, and practices governing the social fields of everyday life".

Learners develop their critical literacy as they make meaning of semiotic domains such as animated cartoons, which make use of multiple channels of communication (e.g. images, speech, gestures, etc.) to communicate distinctive types of meanings (Gee, 2004). For instance, learners can develop their critical literacy by providing interpretations of the story and characters based on their identities, perspectives, experiences and cultures (Ajayi, 2011). Since audio-visual media like animated cartoons combine language with other channels of communication, they constitute important media texts from which children can develop their critical literacy (Souto-Manning & Price-Dennis, 2012; Ajayi, 2011). The term critical refers to the ability to put forward arguments and to judge (Luke, 2012).

The definition of literacy is continuously changing and becoming more complex as it is taking into account the learning of a repertoire of practices of communication in social and cultural contexts (Nixon, 2003).

According to Ajayi (2011, p. 399), as children "read" these digital texts, they think reflectively about issues presented, critique different positions, and raise questions which help them develop analytical skills and knowledge for critical analysis of texts.

However, teaching critical literacy through cartoons provides educators with several challenges in order to adapt and blend traditional approaches with new approaches to teaching and learning (Walsh, 2010). Some of these challenges include; lack of teachers" knowledge and training, access to equipment and resources required, planning challenges and time management challenges (Ryan, Scott, & Walsh, 2010). Furthermore, it is also a challenge to relate activities involving audio-visual texts like cartoons to specific syllabus outcomes and to incorporate these texts in curriculum documents (Walsh, 2010).

Yet, research suggests that animated cartoons have pedagogical relevance and educational values which prove to be more effective than traditional teaching methods (Çelik & Gündoğdu, 2016). This is because cartoons captures children"s attention and allows them to "travel with their mind in a world of imagination and amusement while they are learning" (Dalacosta, Paparrigopoulou-Kamariotaki, Palyvos, & Spyrellis, 2009, p. 741). Dalacosta et al. (2009) also state that the use of animated cartoons significantly increases primary students" knowledge and understanding of specific concepts which are normally difficult to comprehend. Dalacosta, Paparrigopoulou-Kamariotaki, and Pavlatou (2011) affirm that:

> "The general basis for learning with animation in the case of cartoons is that animation can assist a student in mentally picturing what is taking place during an activity, process or procedure while icons or characters are moving." (Dalacosta et al., 2011, p. 3273)

Dalacosta et al. (2009) also state that in the case of children, animated cartoons can be used when the material presented is of a moderate level, when students require motion to be visualised, and when explicit links need to be made between text / narration and animation. Educators can also make use of animated cartoons to gain children‟s attention through special effects and moving icons or characters, including cartoons and text / narration (Dalacosta et al., 2009).

Cartoons and cartoon characters have been used in educational programs intended for children with mental health challenges (Yamamoto, Matsumoto, & Bernard, 2017). The study by Yamamoto, Matsumoto, and Bernard (2017), indicates that through the „You Can Do It!‟ (YCDI) educational program on resilience, which made use of the cartoon character Doraemon (Fujio, 1969), elementary Japanese children understood this behavioural concept and showed significant improvements in resilience and social support.

Further educational benefits have been documented with the use of concept cartoons (Naylor & Keogh, 2013). Concept cartoons consist of different learning and teaching tools based on constructivist views of learning which are primarily used in elementary primary science education (Naylor & Keogh, 2013).

These cartoons have been effectively used in education for creating focused discussions and interactive argumentation where children made their reasoning visible (Chin & Teou, 2009; Kabapinar, 2005). Concept cartoons also provide an opportunity for students to discuss opposing viewpoints posed by cartoon characters in their dialogue (Chin & Teou, 2009).

These views posed by the cartoon characters, can be critically judged and compared by the students without them feeling threatened about expressing their own opinions (Kinchin, 2004). Furthermore, concept cartoons are also used to scaffold students‟ argumentation, remedy students‟ misconceptions, and as an effective assessment strategy (Sexton, 2010; Chin & Teou, 2009).

Cartoons have also been used in foreign language teaching especially to develop students‟ listening comprehension skills (Abuzahara, Farrah, & Zalloum, 2016). The benefit of using cartoons for listening comprehension activities is that the students are exposed to the correct pronunciation of words and they acquire knowledge of the language in a contextual way (Abuzahara et al., 2016).

Marić (2017) proposes four Tom and Jerry (Hanna & Barbera, 1940-1958) episodes from which children can learn both Music and English, which are; "Johann Mouse" (1952), "Hollywood Bowl" (1950), "The Cat Above and the Mouse Below" (1964), and "The Cat Concerto" (1947). Marić (2017) suggests these episodes help students to learn different musical instruments of a symphonic orchestra and different players‟ roles (e.g. pianist, violinist, conductor and singer).

Figure 13 represents the musical instruments and roles of the players which are illustrated in the episode "Hollywood Bowl" (1950) from the animated cartoon Tom and Jerry (Time of Screenshot 1 (top): 06:06; Time of Screenshot 2 (bottom): 06:26).

Figure 13. Screenshots from the Tom and Jerry episode "Hollywood Bowl" (1950) illustrating different musical instruments and roles of the players.

Furthermore, according to Marić (2017), these episodes help in linking Music and English learning as children can practice language by retelling the plot of a story or by reading the transcript of the story, such as that from the cartoon "Johann Mouse".

Animated cartoons can also be integrated in Art lessons because, as Haanstra (2010) suggests, art teachers need to provide opportunities to students which connect self-initiated art work and school art effectively. This can be achieved by allowing learners to use certain themes and to draw in certain styles such as comic books and cartoons (Haanstra, 2010). Furthermore, such self-initiated art work can also be exhibited or published in the school paper (Haanstra, 2010).

All of these studies suggest that cartoons can be used effectively to increase students" motivation and to help students in developing their knowledge, as well as their analytical and literacy skills (Ajayi, 2011; Dalacosta et al., 2009). These educational values, applications, and uses associated with cartoons highlight the importance and relevance that this art form has in the educational context, especially in improving the educational experience of primary children (Ajayi, 2011).

2.7 The Maltese Context

The Maltese National Curriculum framework states that in their primary educational years, children are to be introduced to different experiences, media and materials which allow them to develop their own ideas and experiment with alternative ways of problem-solving (Ministry for Education and Employment, 2012). Exposure to these different sources of information occurs through powerful learning experiences that contribute to the development of children (Ministry for Education and Employment, 2012). These powerful learning experiences can be facilitated through; "a shift to constructivist education philosophies, student-centred learning activities, and access to both local and global resources" (Ministry for Education and Employment, 2012, p. 37).

Furthermore, the NCF (Ministry for Education and Employment, 2012) also encourages educators to make use of the potential of technologies to enable children to show and create knowledge, increase the complexity of tasks, and make use of different representations through different channels of communication. It also highlights the importance of digital literacy in enhancing; "the teaching and learning processes, the interaction among peers, and interactions between students and teachers" (Ministry for Education and Employment, 2012, p. 37). It argues for more active exploitation of digital literacy tools in learning and teaching processes which impact positively on the educational experiences of children and young people (Ministry for Education and Employment, 2012). Despite the educational relevance of cartoons as mentioned above, the National Curriculum Framework (Ministry for Education and Employment, 2012) does not include a statement which promotes the use of cartoons for educational purposes. This indicates that as suggested by Walsh (2010), animated cartoons should be better considered for incorporation into curricula including the Maltese National Curriculum and related frameworks.

Unlike the Maltese National Curriculum Framework, foreign primary education curricula like the Hong Kong school curriculum (The Curriculum Development Council, 2017) have included cartoons as part of the key learning areas especially in children"s art and music education. Therefore, as suggested by Dickie and Shuker (2014), our interpretation of the curriculum needs to incorporate children"s knowledge and expertise of cartoons into the official curriculum. This can also be achieved by developing cross-curricular lessons through cross-curricular themes which integrate animated cartoons into subjects such as Music and Art as exemplified by Marić (2017) and Haanstra (2010).

Locally, attempts have been made to use cartoon characters for informal educational purposes about climate change and environmental protection (Buttigieg & Pace, 2013). Figure 14 (Image retrieved from Parnis, 2017) shows one such character which is Xummiemu - a hedgehog cartoon character launched in a campaign aimed to develop pro-environmental behaviour in school children (Buttigieg & Pace, 2013).

Figure 14. Xummiemu.

This cartoon character was featured on school magazines, books, media, posters, stickers and comics to create environmental awareness and to advocate against littering (Buttigieg & Pace, 2013).

Another local cartoon character which has been used and is still informally used for educational purposes is Fonzu l-Fenek (Fonzu the rabbit) which is represented in Figure 15 (Image retrieved from https://www.fonzulfenek.org/).

Figure 15. Fonzu l-Fenek (Fonzu the rabbit) together with his friends Lola n-Nannakola (left) and Miċu l-Qattus (right).

This cartoon character is featured in images, videos, songs and stories aimed at primary children. Fonzu l-Fenek on YouTube has gained popularity to the extent that currently his videos reached a total of 1,951,616 views with 3,290 subscribers to his channel (Fonzu l-Fenek, 2011). These educational resources can also be found on the cartoon character‟s website: https://www.fonzulfenek.org/

Since cartoons are audio-visual texts which have been reported to improve children‟s literacy skills (Lenters, 2018), we need to specifically acknowledge its‟ educational value by incorporating it in the primary school curriculum. This is because cartoons constitute an optimal pedagogical tool in enhancing the educational experiences of primary children (Ajayi, 2011).

Furthermore, more research is required on the local use of cartoons and cartoon characters for educational purposes, although studies like Dunlop (2014) and Paris and Ho (2003) have researched the use of cartoons in Maltese primary and secondary education. The study by Paris and Ho (2003) suggests that learning through the use of cartoons is more effective and enjoyable for children. Both Dunlop (2014) and Paris an Ho (2003) indicate that teachers perceive cartoons as beneficial for students" learning. Dunlop (2014) also suggests that teachers can use concept cartoons in the classroom to address students" misconceptions and for assessment purposes. However, Dunlop (2014) and Paris and Ho (2003) did not investigate how primary children understand and relate with cartoon characters as was intended in this study (Refer to Chapter 1).

2.8 Conclusion

In this chapter I discussed what international and a few local researchers have stated about animated cartoons and their use as an educational resource. For this purpose, I described what animated cartoons portray and the potential ways how these portrayals may influence children. Apart from this, I discussed the different types of relationships which exist between primary children and animated cartoon characters and how children make meaning of animated cartoons. I linked these concepts about children"s understanding of animated cartoons with potential ways of how educators can use cartoons to teach different subjects such as languages, Science, Music and Art. This led me to view how children can benefit from learning through animated cartoons and how cartoons can be used in lessons of different curricular subjects.

Chapter 3 – Methodology

3. Outline

Throughout this chapter, I will be explaining the rationale behind the research methods adopted, the data collection procedures, ethical considerations relating to this study, and the ways in which the data collected was analysed. As stated in Chapter 1, this study aims to address the following research questions:

1. How do primary children understand and relate to cartoon characters?

2. What teaching implications can primary school educators draw from children‟s understanding of animated cartoons to create effective learning?

In order to address these research questions, I chose an effective research design, data collection tools, and data analysis methods all of which lead to the results obtained in this study. I provided primary school children with the opportunity to express their understanding and relationship with cartoon characters. In order to increase the validity (Refer to Glossary of Terms) of this research as much as possible, I intended to triangulate data (Newby, 2014) using different children‟s interpretations produced through various activities. Triangulation of data implies the use of multiple sources of evidence in the data collection process, which improves the research reliability and validity (Creswell, 2014; Newby, 2014). Reliability refers to replicability of the data collection processes and the results, whereas validity refers to the accuracy of the data collection process in measuring what it is intended to measure (Leung, 2015; Newby, 2014).

After compiling and reflecting on the children‟s interpretations of their understanding and relationship with cartoon characters, I provided suggestions which primary educators can implement as part of their pedagogy.

In order for the reader to understand better the steps taken when collecting data for this research, in Table 2a and 2b I am presenting these steps as taken in chronological order.

Month	Steps taken for data collection
November – December 2017	I started thinking about the focus of this thesis and discussed the ideas with my supervisor. The main idea which I wanted to research was the effect of cartoons on primary children so that lessons can be developed which are based on the students‟ interests. During this period I used to carry out observations in the state school in which eventually I carried out the actual data collection. However, these observations were not related to this research.
December 2017 – March 2019	I drafted and finalised the research proposal including the UREC and FREC proposal forms for ethical clearance. This process included the drafting of permission letters, information letters, and consent forms which were eventually used to obtain permissions, consents and assents.
April – August 2018	Following the acceptance of the proposal and ethical clearance from FREC, I sought permission from the respective educational institutions and consequently from the Heads of Schools.

Table 2a. Table of steps taken to undertake this study and to collect data in chronological order from November 2017 to August 2018.

September 2018	<u>Pilot study</u> (Refer to sub-section 3.5.1): Following the granting of these permissions, I sent information letters to the teachers and consent forms to the parents. Once I collected the parents" consents and the children provided their assent on the assent forms, I piloted the study during SkolaSajf in two different state schools. After piloting the study, I analysed points for improvement and sought permission from the Head of School where eventually I carried out the actual data collection.
October 2018	Following the Heads" permission, I distributed the information letters to the teachers and the parents together. Together with the information letters, I also distributed the consent forms to the parents of the students who attend the school in which the actual study was to be conducted.
November 2018	I developed a questionnaire which was to be used for selecting the participants for the actual study. <u>Piloting of questionnaire</u> (Refer to sub-section 3.5.1): After the parents consented and the children assented to participate, I piloted the questionnaire with students who attend different schools from those in which I carried out the pilot study and the actual data collection. <u>Actual study</u> (Refer to sub-section 3.5.2): Following the piloting of the questionnaire, I administered the questionnaire to all year 5 students in the school where the actual data collection was to be carried out. I selected 10 participants from the different classes based on the participants" response in the questionnaire. Then I carried out the rest of the actual data collection activities (drawing, writing, cartoon watching and informal interviews) with these 10 students.

Table 2b. Table of steps taken to undertake this study and to collect data in chronological order from September 2018 to November 2018.

3.1 Ontology and Epistemology

In order to carry out this research, I needed to choose an adequate ontology and epistemology from various ontological and epistemological alternatives. Ontology refers to the "nature of reality", whereas epistemology refers to "the nature of knowledge and how it can be acquired" (Creswell, 2014, p. 54; Ormston, Spencer, Barnard, & Snape, 2014, p. 4, 6). This project recognises the value of children‟s experiences, understandings and perspectives (Fane, MacDougall, Jovanovic, Redmond, & Gibbs, 2018). Thus, this study is based on the ontological position that children are viewed as "experts in their own lives" (Tangen, 2008, p. 160) who are able to represent their own lived realities.

Being "experts", children have a privileged access to knowledge of their own experiences. Therefore, the ontological position on which this study is based relates to an open insider epistemology in which children are regarded as insiders, as they have access to this knowledge, whereas the researcher is regarded as an outsider (Tangen, 2008). The open insider epistemology fits in participatory methodologies where the children (insiders) act as co-researchers, working with the researcher (outsider) to develop new knowledge through an active process of communication (Mason & Danby, 2011; Tangen, 2008). Such communication involves listening, interpretation and meaning making of the children‟s experiences, their understanding and lived realities (Lipponen, Rajala, Hilppö, & Paananen, 2016). The ideas of multiple realities (Creswell, 2013), multiple interpretations of, and perspectives on a subject are features of interpretative research (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2011).

Unlike positivist research which seeks to understand the world as "given", interpretivist and constructivist research assume that the social world "is produced and reinforced by humans through action and interaction" (Goldkuhl, 2012, p. 138). Therefore, researchers investigating the social world need to understand it through the participants and their own perspectives such that the explanations derived can only be attributed to meaning (Ormston et al., 2014). For this reason, I considered that an interpretivist approach is more relevant to this research because the students needed to provide different interpretations based on their lived experiences and realities. The students" interpretations helped me answer the research questions addressed in this study described in Chapter 1 and to understand how a group of primary school children understand and relate to cartoon characters. This is why an interpretivist approach was more appropriate for this study.

Despite the advantages that this epistemology offers, I am aware that it has associated limitations such as a small sample size which has implications on the results which cannot be generalised (Creswell, 2013). Another limitation of this epistemology is that the researchers and interpretivists may let their emotions, values, charactersitics enter the research which limits a true understanding of the participants" perspectives and meanings (Yilmaz, 2013; Cohen et al., 2011). This issue of reflexivity (Ormston et al., 2014) occurs because researchers bring their knowledge, experiences and lived realities to the research, which influence the ways in which participants behave in their presence (Cohen et al., 2011). For this reason, researchers should pay particular attention to their own interactions with participants, and their reaction and roles as these factors might bias the research (Ormston et al., 2014; Cohen et al., 2011).

3.1.1 My Role as a Researcher

In this research, my role as a researcher was to compare and represent the children‟s interpretations with regards to cartoon characters. Due to the issue of reflexivity (Ormston et al., 2014), I was careful not to influence the participants‟ interpretation in any way possible. In order to achieve this, I avoided mentioning personal impressions or preferences of cartoon characters before or during the activities. I also chose my words carefully during the informal interviews so as not to affect the participants‟ response. For example when asking the students why they chose a particular character to draw, I asked them "Why did you choose to draw this character?" rather than asking "Did you choose this character because it‟s beautiful?" Also, in the representation of data, I quoted the students‟ descriptions rather than provide my interpretation of what the students described. In this way, I avoided bias in the collection, interpretation and representation of data such that „empathic neutrality‟ (Ormston et al., 2014) was achieved as much as possible.

3.2 The Research Design

In order to collect data for this study, I needed to choose an appropriate methodology from the qualitative method, quantitative method or a combination of both methods. This study aims at obtaining an in-depth understanding rather than a generalisation of the children‟s understanding and relationship with cartoon characters based on their experiences and lived realities. Such an in-depth understanding is characteristic of qualitative research (Creswell, 2014). Data in the qualitative method consist of drawings, texts and interpretations, whereas data in the quantitative method consist of numbers (Newby, 2014; Cohen et al., 2011).

Therefore, the qualitative method was more appropriate for this study since the data collected consists of children"s representations and interpretations. Furthermore, in qualitative studies, data is collected from a naturalistic setting (Creswell, 2013) as is intended in this project. However, in order to determine characteristics of the population sampled, such as; how much time the children spend watching cartoons and the number of students preferring a particular cartoon, the quantitative method was also required.

Given the complexity and nature of this research, I chose to adopt a concurrent nested approach (Creswell, 2003) whereby the predominant method which guides the project is the qualitative method, whilst the quantitative method is embedded or nested to enrich the description of the research participants.

The concurrent nested model is a mixed methods approach because the researcher uses a combination of the qualitative and the quantitative method as opposed to the predominant method alone (Creswell, 2003). This approach has its limitations mainly that the data from the combination of methods need to be integrated into the analysis part of the research and that the predominance of one of the methods leads to unequal evidence within the study (Creswell, 2003). However, the benefits of this approach are highlighted by Ormston et al. (2014, p. 45) who state that through using a mixed methods approach, each method adds to "a more nuanced picture of complex social phenomena".

3.2.1 Multimodal Concepts adopted

Apart from the concurrent nested model which was adopted for collecting data, in this study, I chose to adopt a multimodal approach in order to compare the children"s interpretations and to derive pedagogical suggestions from them. This is because multimodality refers to approaches that understand communication and representation to be more than about language, and which attend to the full range of different communicational forms/ semiotic resources which people use (Jewitt, Bezemer & O'Halloran, 2016; Jewitt, 2011). These semiotic resources for making meaning are socially and culturally shaped and may be referred to as modes (Kress, 2010). Modes of making meaning (Kress, 2010) include image, writing, layout, speech, gesture, and facial expression (Refer to Glossary of Terms), each offering distinct potentialities and limitations which are referred to as modal affordances (Jewitt et al., 2016). Based on their modal affordances, modes can be categorised into superordinate modes and subordinate modes. Superordinate modes include modes which have the highest potential of conveying meaning to a particular interpreter, whilst subordinate modes carry less meaning (Norris, 2004).

Multimodality enables the description of semiotic resources and investigations on how different semiotic resources function to communicate meaning. Multimodality also allows for the analysis of the relationship across and between modes in conveying meaning (Jewitt, 2011). Applications of multimodality extend to the field of education as it enables an understanding of how knowledge is shaped through different modal realisations and how this affects learners and learning (Jewitt & Kress, 2003).

3.3 Sampling

3.3.1 The School Setting

The schools in which I carried out the pilot study and the actual study are all primary state schools and share similar characteristics except for the number of students which varies from one school to another. A pilot study is an investigation of the effectiveness of the research procedures prior to using them in the actual study (Newby, 2014), as explained in sub-section 3.5.1. Despite that the pilot study and the actual study were carried out in different schools, the contexts of the schools were similar. I am presenting a profile of the school where the actual study was carried out in Table 3.

School profile

The school where the actual study was carried out is a primary state school in the southern part of Malta. It is a school which provides education to approximately 780 students from different nationalities and with different cultural identities. In each year group there are around 110 students who are divided into 4 to 5 classes such that each classroom contains around 22-23 students. The school aims to educate students equally and to help them in their learning and development on a personal, social, and educational basis within a friendly and safe environment.

Table 3. Profile of school where actual study was carried out.

According to Obondo, Lahdenperä & Sandevärn (2016), intercultural education refers to teaching approaches in culturally diverse classrooms. Since the school context in which I carried out the actual study harbours an interaction of cultures, it helped me in answering the research questions and in providing multimodal pedagogical suggestions (Refer to Chapter 5) which can be implemented in culturally diverse classrooms.

I chose the schools in which I carried out the pilot study and the actual research using convenience sampling (Newby, 2014). Convenience sampling is a nonprobability sampling technique used by researchers when the target population meets certain practical criteria such as; easy accessibility, availability at a given time, or the willingness to participate (Etikan, Musa, & Alkassim, 2016). Ormston et al. (2014) state that the sampling strategy adopted in any research constitutes an integral component of the research design as it will affect the usefulness of the data collected, the type of analysis, and the extent of generalizability of the results.

Despite considering other sampling techniques, I chose to use convenience sampling for selecting the schools because I was familiar with the schools" contexts, and school procedures. I am aware that this sampling strategy has certain limitations. An important limitation of convenience sampling is that the results originating from data collected through this strategy cannot be generalised to a wider population (Cohen et al., 2011). However, as already claimed in Section 3.2, this study aims at obtaining an in-depth understanding of particular experiences and relationships rather than a general finding. Furthermore, I chose different primary state schools for the pilot and actual studies through convenience sampling because I worked as a student teacher during the teaching practice period in one of the schools and I knew a teacher who works in the other school. This provided me with the advantage of easier access to the schools, and as stated in Cohen et al. (2011) convenience sampling has the advantage of requiring less time and money resources.

3.3.2 The Participants – Sample Size and Selection

In qualitative studies, the sample size usually consists of a few individuals (Creswell, 2013). Creswell (2013) recommends that in qualitative studies, the researcher works with 3 to 10 participants. Therefore, I chose to work with ten students in the actual study as it is a large enough number that allows for students‟ diverse expressions from which their understanding and experiences with regards to animated cartoon characters can be understood.

I decided to work with Year 5, 9- and 10-year old students. At this age, the students should develop aesthetic awareness, particularly understanding of the elements of visual language and the use of media for expression and communication. This is because the Art and Design syllabus for Year 5 (https://curriculum.gov.mt/en/Curriculum/Year-1-to-6/Documents/pr_syllabi/syllab_pr_artyear5.pdf) and the Level 6 Visual and Performing Arts learning outcomes (http://www.schoolslearningoutcomes.edu.mt/en/subjects/art/level/6) includes these skills and competences. The children‟s capacity for higher cognitive thinking, aesthetic and moral thinking develop when they express their views through drawing (Latham & Ewing, 2018). Therefore I chose to work with Year 5 students because in this study, these competencies are required for children‟s effective communication and meaning making with regards to the cartoon characters with which they relate. Furthermore, from a practical point of view, the activities will be more feasible to carry out with Year 5 students as they do not have the Benchmark examinations like Year 6 students. Also, for ethical reasons, the activities with the children were not intended to be carried out during or exactly prior to examination sessions. Consequently, I concluded that Year 5 students were the most suitable participants for this research.

Since there were around 110, Year 5 students attending the school in which the actual study was carried out (Refer to sub-section 3.3.1), I chose to employ a multi-stage sampling strategy (Newby, 2014; Cohen et al., 2011). This sampling strategy allows a narrowing down of the population to a carefully drawn sample by taking a sample from a sample as shown in Figure 16 (Cohen et al., 2011). In Figure 16 (adapted from Newby (2014)), blue squares represent Year 5 students who participated at each stage whereas white squares represent students who did not participate at a particular stage.
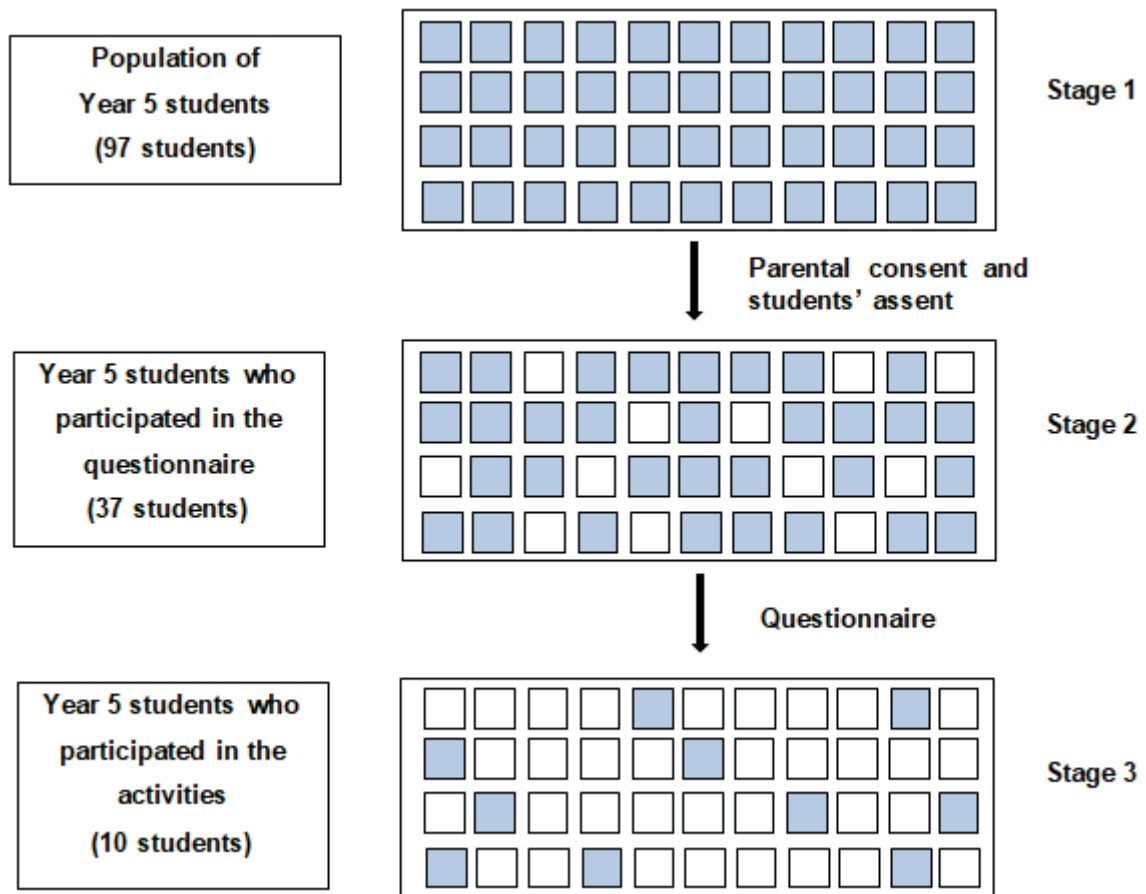
Figure 16. Diagram of multi-stage sampling as used for selecting participants in this study.

Apart from offering a cost-effective way of carefully drawing a sample, this sampling strategy allows the movement from the general to the specific (Newby, 2014). As can be seen in Figure 16, from the population of 97, Year 5 students at Stage 1, 37 students got their parents" consent and assented to participate in the activities. In order to arrive to the final ten participants who participated in the remaining activities, a questionnaire (Refer to sub-section 3.4.1) was developed and administered to the students so that another sub-sample was carefully drawn at Stage 2 of the data collection process.

The questionnaire enabled the selection of ten students who had previously developed positive and negative parasocial relationships, i.e. imaginary relationships, with cartoon characters. This is important in order to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of children"s relationships with cartoon characters (Jennings & Alper, 2016). The ten students selected based on the questionnaire, took part in the other activities at Stage 3, which included drawing, writing, informal interviews, and cartoon watching. In order to represent the students" representations and interpretations in the Data Presentation, Analysis and Discussion (Chapter 4), I created student profiles for the ten participants who took part in these activities, which are represented in Table 4. The student profiles in Table 4 are based on the students" interpretations which they provided during the data collection activities. Following the suggestions by Tisdall, Davis, and Gallagher (2008), the names of the students mentioned in the student profiles are all fictitious because of ethical principles regarding confidentiality and anonymity.

Sarah	Sabienne
Sarah is a Year 5 girl who likes cartoons because she feels that when she watches cartoons, she enters another world. She watches cartoons 2 days a week for more than an hour. The cartoons which she watches are; My Little Pony, Equestria girls movie, and Monster High.	Sabienne is a Year 5 girl who does not watch cartoons. She does not like cartoons because she does not like watching television. The cartoon which she dislikes most is SpongeBob Squarepants.
Sebastian	**Samantha**
Sebastian is a Year 5 boy who likes to watch cartoons because according to him they are funny and have nice characters. He watches cartoons every day for more than an hour. Adventure Time is the cartoon which he chose to describe in this study.	Samantha is a Year 5 girl who likes to watch cartoons because she feels that they make her laugh and that she learns from cartoons. She watches cartoons every day for around an hour. She likes to watch; Miraculous, Paw Patrol, Dora the Explorer, and Ruby and Max.
Samuel	**Stephanie**
Samuel is a Year 5 boy who likes cartoons because according to him they bring him memories of when he was a child. He watches cartoons every day for more than an hour. The cartoons which he watches are; Tom and Jerry and SpongeBob Squarepants.	Stephanie is a Year 5 girl who does not like cartoons. The Pink Panther is the only cartoon which she likes. The cartoon which she dislikes most is Scooby Doo.

Table 4a. Profiles of the students who participated in the remaining activities.

Sabrina	Sven
Sabrina is a Year 5 girl who likes cartoons because she loves the characters and according to her, they are funny. She watches cartoons 4 days a week for around an hour. The cartoons which she watches are; Teen Titans Go and Fingerlings.	Sven is a Year 5 boy who likes cartoons because according to him sometimes they are funny, sometimes they are about fantasy, and sometimes they include fighting. He watches cartoons 5 days a week for less than an hour. The cartoons which he watches are; Tom and Jerry, Peppa Pig, Bugs Bunny, and Scooby Doo.
Scarlett	Selena
Scarlett is a Year 5 girl who likes cartoons because according to her sometimes they have adventures which children love to watch and most of the time the cartoons are colourful. She watches cartoons from Friday to Sunday for less than an hour per day. She watches Shimmer and shine, Sunny day, and Nella the Princess Knight.	Selena is a Year 5 girl who likes cartoons because according to her *"there is a cartoon which is cool, fun and is soooooo nice. The name of this cartoon is Gravity Falls and it is full of mystery."* She watches cartoons every day for less than an hour.

Table 4b. More profiles of the students who participated in the remaining activities.

3.4 Research Instruments

In order to reach the aims of this research which were described in Chapter 1, the following research instruments were used:

1. Children‟s questionnaire (sub-section 3.4.1)

2. Children‟s drawings (sub-section 3.4.2)

3. Narrative Observations (sub-section 3.4.3)

4. Informal Interviews with the children (sub-section 3.4.4)

5. Cartoon watching (sub-section 3.4.5)

3.4.1 Children's Questionnaire

A questionnaire is a structured format which generates a response from individuals by asking them specific questions (Newby, 2014). A questionnaire designed with considerable care can be used by researchers to obtain good quality data from children and young respondents (Bell, 2007). The first research instrument used in this study was a „children‟s questionnaire‟ (Refer to Appendix A). In this study, the questionnaire was developed both for the purpose of carefully drawing a sample from the population through multi-stage sampling (Refer to sub-section 3.3.2) and to obtain information about the sampled population. When designing the questionnaire, I considered the question length and wording, the number and order of questions as well as the type of questions asked following suggestions by Cohen, et al. (2011) and Bell (2007). The questionnaire consists of 6 questions designed to obtain general insights about the student population, including their likeness of cartoons, their cartoon watching habits, which cartoons they watch and whether they would like to participate in activities related to cartoons or not.

The questionnaire includes questions which are ordered from closed general questions to more open-ended and specific questions. This is because closed questions prescribe the range of responses from the respondents and are able to generate frequencies of response (Cohen et al., 2011). On the other hand, open-ended questions enable the respondents to answer in their own words and provide an explanation for such a response (Newby, 2014; Cohen et al., 2011).

The first question asks whether the children watch cartoons or not as this determines the children‟s responses to the following questions.

The first question is linked to the fourth question in which the students needed to specify when and for how long they watch cartoons. The second and third questions are linked and are intended to determine whether the children like cartoons or not and the reasons behind their response. Question five asks the children to provide the names of cartoons that they watch. Finally, question 6 is intended to determine whether the children would like to participate further through the rest of the activities in this research. Bell (2007) explains that one way of ensuring the quality and effectiveness of a questionnaire is to test it through a pilot study. Therefore, I piloted the questionnaire which I used in this study as explained in sub-section 3.5.1.

During the actual study, the questionnaire was administered to the students in the school top corridor as this was the only space available in the school. However, the students felt comfortable answering the questionnaire in the corridor as they were familiar with the environment which formed part of their natural setting. Tisdall et al. (2008) suggest that it is important for the students to feel welcome and comfortable to communicate in the space provided. The corridor environment where the questionnaire was held is described in Table 5.

Corridor environment
The corridor in which the questionnaire was conducted is located on the top floor of the school where there are the Year 5 and 6 classes. It is well decorated with students" work including; charts, crafts and decorations. The corridor had a large table at the side on which the children answered the questionnaire whilst sitting comfortably on chairs around this table. The corridor was well lit with both sunlight and artificial white light.

Table 5. Corridor environment where the questionnaire was held during the actual study.

The students from each class who had parental consent and who had assented participated in the questionnaire together. This was the only data collection activity in which the students participated together as the questions in the questionnaire were generic and did not reveal what the other activities were going to ask regarding cartoon characters. However, when explaining the questionnaire to the students, I ensured that the students did not copy or share their answers with each other. I did this by explaining to the students that they need to answer the questionnaire individually based on their likes and their cartoon watching experience, and that they can ask me if they do not understand a question. The students took between 10 to 15 minutes to complete the questionnaire.

The questionnaire enabled the selection of ten participants who were willing to participate in the rest of the activities and who had formed positive and negative parasocial relationships with cartoon characters (Jennings & Alper, 2016). Based on the children‟s response to the last and the first three questions, these participants were selected for participation in the rest of the activities as explained in sub-section 3.7.1. The rest of the questions were used to obtain general information about the cartoon watching habits of the sample population.

3.4.2 Children's Interpretations through Drawing

Participatory drawing is a qualitative, non-mechanical, visual research method which is used with children because it is comparatively more expressive, engaging, and provides an enjoyable experience for those involved (Literat, 2013).

For this reason it has been extensively used in child-centred, visual research as it provides a „voice" to the children through which they can represent the diversity of their childhood experiences (Mand, 2012). Due to its‟ co-constructed and playful nature, as well as its‟ lack of dependence on linguistic proficiency, Literat (2013) states that participatory drawing is a highly efficient and ethically sound research strategy for work with children. These features of drawing help children transform what they know into modes of representation that allow for communication of their ideas, thoughts, and experiences.

As Kress (2000, p. 195) explains, "drawings show an astonishing conceptual understanding and imagination that cannot be expressed through language, even language in narrative format." According to Coates and Coates (2006), children‟s drawings show the stage of development of children‟s creative skills, as well as the way that some children have an innate sense of visual acuity as they create complicated, yet clearly and carefully composed pictures. This seems to suggest that not only are children aware of the relationships of colour and the qualities of each with regards to its visual purpose, but children are also able to decide which modes are best suited for them to convey meaning and provide their interpretation of texts (Literat, 2013; Coates & Coates, 2006). However, Kendrick and McKay (2004) argue that drawings capture and infer children‟s moods, sentiments, relationships and interactions that are embedded in different literacy contexts of children‟s lives. Einarsdottir, Dockett, and Perry (2009) further add that drawings reflect the children‟s cultural and social contexts, which impact on the drawing process and the meanings conveyed.

Despite these reflections on what children"s drawings show, Stanczak (2007, p. 10) argues that "The meaning of images resides most significantly in the ways that participants interpret those images, rather than as some inherent property of the images themselves." Therefore, in order to understand the meanings in children"s drawings, one must evaluate the children"s interpretations of them, by focusing on children"s intentions, considering the process of drawing, and recognising children"s drawings as purposeful (Einarsdottir et al., 2009).

In their meaning making process through drawing, children provide interpretations of their drawing through talk as they discuss the drawing"s content and add information on the topic, which is not obvious from looking at the completed picture alone (Coates & Coates, 2006). In fact, Wright (2007) states that during this process, children share meaning in both verbal and non-verbal modes. For the purposes of this study, I will only focus on the verbal mode by which the children provide their interpretation of their drawings through the informal interview. This is because, as Literat (2013, p. 84) suggests, the analysis of children"s drawings should be complemented by a subsequent discussion of these drawings in the context of their production in order to reveal "a more nuanced depiction of concepts, emotions, and information in an expressive, empowering, and personally relevant manner."

In this study, the ten students participated on an individual basis (Refer to sub-section 3.5.2) in the drawing activities which took place in a Year 5 classroom where some of the students have their lessons.

This is because it was available at the time of the data collection and it constitutes the students" own natural setting (Creswell, 2013). The Year 5 classroom in which the drawing activities were carried out is described in Table 6.

Year 5 Classroom Environment
This classroom was spacious with multiple rows of individual students" desks. This classroom was decorated with students" decorations, Christmas decorations and a Christmas tree at the time of the study. In the classroom there was an interactive whiteboard and a traditional whiteboard on the wall where the students" desks were facing. This classroom was well-illuminated with both natural and white, artificial light.

Table 6. Year 5 classroom in which the drawing and writing activities and the informal interview were carried out.

The duration of the drawing activity varied from one student to another, however the students spent roughly around thirty minutes on the drawing activity. Despite the time afforded to carry out the activities (Refer to Section 6.2), when allocating the time for the drawing activity I considered that the students" drawings reflect the students" decision and choice of representation and meaning making for providing a complete picture of their understanding and relationship with cartoon characters.

Before participating in the drawing activity, the participants were reminded that they could stop doing the activities at any time should they wish to (Refer to Section 3.6). Then, I explained to the students that in the first activity they need to draw a cartoon character that they choose. I explained to the children that they should not write their names on the paper such that they would not worry that somebody other than me would know that the drawing is theirs.

I also informed the children that I will collect the drawings at the end of the activities as these are needed for analysis and for comparison of data. In order to participate in the drawing activity, the children were given a blank A4 white paper and a set of pencil colours. The children were provided with the same availability and choice of colours and a blank A4 paper since colour (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996) and layout (Kress, 2010) are both modes which children can utilise to express themselves about cartoon characters.

In order to provide interpretations of their drawings, the children were asked to write some sentences to describe the cartoon character that they chose to draw. This is because writing is another mode through which meaning is made (Kress, 2010). For this, the children were provided with an A4 foolscap paper with lines on which they can describe the cartoon characters which they drew and to provide reasons why they chose these characters. All of the ten students selected as explained in sub-section 3.3.2, participated in the drawing activity.

3.4.3 Narrative Observations

In the drawing process, children share their ideas about the drawing subject, inform others about the content of their drawings and the meaning of their symbols, narrate stories, guess the meaning of each other"s symbols, and occasionally copy parts of each other"s work (Papandreou, 2014). Therefore, the drawing process also includes the children"s thinking, talking and social interactions which can be recorded through observations (Coates & Coates, 2006). For this reason, during data collection, I used to record the narrative observations in the form of field notes on a note book.

Flick, (2018) recommends that such field notes are taken throughout the research process and that these should include; observations, methodological and theoretical notes, as well as personal reflections. The field notes which I took during the data collection process included information such as; how long the children took to choose their favourite cartoon character, verbal descriptions of the characters being drawn and children"s verbal expressions of their relationship with cartoon characters.

In this study, I used narrative observations (Coates & Coates, 2006) while children are drawing so that I can record the children"s talk during the drawing process in their naturalistic setting. This provided me with information on the children"s thinking, expressions and social interactions in the process which the drawing alone cannot portray (Coates & Coates, 2006). I also used narrative observations when the children watched a 5 minute clip of the cartoons that they chose (Refer to sub-section 3.4.5). This enabled the children to express their relationship with the cartoon characters as they watched them or after they watched them on the videos.

3.4.4 Informal Interviews with Children

An informal interview is a research tool in the form of a conversation between the interviewer and the participants in which key issues relevant to the research are discussed (Cohen et al., 2011). In this study, the interviews were carried out in an informal way, however, they contained elements of a semi-structured interview. This is because in a semi-structured interview, the interviewer is free to explain and modify the number and sequence of questions and their wording for clarification (Newby, 2014; Cohen et al., 2011).

The informal interviews with the children were carried out with the aim of providing the participants with an opportunity to provide a verbal interpretation of their expressions. This way, the children were given a "voice" (Tisdall, 2009, p. 70) in expressing their ideas and interpretations verbally.

I chose informal interviews as one of the research instruments, as these provide the children with an opportunity to express their intentions behind their drawings. When informally interviewing the children, I used a set of informal interview questions (Appendix A) to prompt the children to express themselves about the animated cartoon characters drawn and the intentions behind their drawings. These questions served to guide the conversation such that the interviewee"s responses were as relevant and salient as possible, thereby increasing the reliability and validity of the data collected (Refer to Section 3).

The first two questions of the informal interview were intended to prompt the students to describe the overall drawing and the intention behind the drawing. The next four questions were aimed to guide the students in expressing their understanding and relationship with the cartoon character which they would have drawn. The following four questions were intended for the children to provide a fuller interpretation of their drawing in detail. The last two questions were designated to understand the ways with which the participants felt most comfortable expressing themselves.

Since informal interviews may be carried out in a one-to-one setting, the children would not feel exposed or uncomfortable expressing their ideas and interpretations in front of their friends (Cohen et al., 2011). Furthermore, the researcher may modify the questions, explain them or change the wording such that there are no misunderstandings from the interviewees (Cohen et al., 2011). This way, the respondent"s replies are more salient and relevant to the topic discussed, and the informal interviews" validity and reliability are increased. For these reasons, I chose to carry out informal interviews in a one-to-one setting (Refer to sub-section 3.5.2) to gather data on children"s interpretations of their drawings and their relationship with the characters that they would have drawn.

In this informal interview, the children were given the opportunity to explain what they drew and to make interpretations of their favourite cartoon characters. I only used the interview questions appended to guide the children in their verbal interpretations. This was necessary in order to obtain information about the children"s understanding and relationship with the cartoon character/s which they drew. Before each informal interview, I explained to each child that should they wish to switch off the audio recorder, they can do so at any time during the short interview. I also informed the participants that the audio recorder will be placed on a table within their reach and how the audio recorder can be switched off should they wish to stop the recording (Refer to sub-section 3.6). Each informal interview took around 10 minutes and was conducted in the Year 5 classroom described in Table 6 after each child assented to participate. Eight students out of the ten selected for the rest of the data collection activities (Refer to sub-section 3.3.2) assented to participate in the informal interview.

3.4.5 Cartoon Watching

In this study, I provided the students with an opportunity to watch five minutes of the cartoons which they chose to draw, write and express themselves about. The purpose behind this activity of cartoon watching was to investigate how children understand and construct interpretations of the video, as in Ajayi (2011). This activity provides an opportunity for students to further discuss and express the way that they interpret the cartoons. It also serves as part of data triangulation, in order to validate the information which the students provide. I allocated five minutes for this activity after considering that the time afforded for all the activities was only an hour and that the children could choose any part of a cartoon video which they wanted to interpret. This is because as Fargas-Malet, McSherry, Larkin, and Robinson (2010) suggest data collection activities with children need to respect limitations of time and resources, and at the same time they need to enable children to express themselves. This activity occurred in another classroom due to the availability of the interactive whiteboard for the students to watch the cartoon which they chose. The classroom environment in which the cartoon watching activity was carried out is described in Table 7.

Cartoon Watching Classroom Environment
This classroom was smaller in space compared to the classroom in which the students participated in the other activities. This classroom was not decorated and included tables arranged individually at the side of the room and an interactive whiteboard connected to a computer on the other side. Although this classroom has windows which were covered by the curtains, it was well-illuminated with white artificial light.

Table 7. Classroom environment where the cartoon watching activities were held.

In this cartoon watching activity, the students were allowed to access a cartoon video on the computer which they decided to choose in order to comment, explain and interpret aspects about the cartoon character which they drew. Seven students out of the ten selected for the data collection activities (Refer to sub-section 3.3.2) assented to participate in the cartoon watching activity. These seven participants chose YouTube in order to access a cartoon video of the cartoon character which they chose to describe. Seven students chose to participate in the cartoon watching activity and four of them chose cartoon videos which were between two to five minutes long. The remaining three students, who participated in this activity, chose five minutes from the videos which they decided to watch because these videos were longer than five minutes. Since the students commented and provided interpretations of the cartoon which they chose to watch, this activity included narrative observations. For this reason, I recorded the children"s comments descriptions, explanations and interpretations of the cartoon videos as field notes, as described in sub-section 3.4.3. These field notes are important in describing how children understand and relate to cartoon characters, especially when analysed in addition to the other students" interpretations.

3.5 The Data Collection Process

3.5.1 The Pilot Study

A pilot study is "an investigation that takes place before the main investigation and which is designed to test and evaluate the effectiveness of the research procedures" (Newby, 2014, p. 667). The importance of a pilot study lies in its potential for helping the researcher in identifying problems at the design stage (Tisdall et al., 2008).

For this reason, I piloted the data collection procedures and instruments including the questionnaire and the informal interview. I carried out the pilot study in two primary state schools other than the school in which the actual study was held. The setting of the schools where I held the pilot study was similar to the school context in which the actual study was held (Refer to Table 3). The main difference was that the schools in which I carried out the pilot study had less students particularly because the data was collected during SkolaSajf (Refer to table 2). Since SkolaSajf is a Summer school programme, during this period the students are more at ease compared to their school experience in Winter. The schools where I held the pilot study were selected through convenience sampling (Refer to sub-section 3.3.1). The classes in which the activities were held in the pilot study were similar to the Year 5 class described in Table 6. The only difference was that the classes in which the pilot study was carried out were lit up only by natural light at the time of the study. In the pilot study, a total of six children from both schools provided their assent and participated in the research. The participants in the pilot study were also chosen through convenience sampling as they were the only students who had parental consent and provided their assent for participation.

From the pilot study, I found that the majority of participants were girls because the boys preferred to play football rather than to participate in this research. Therefore, in order to address the experiences of both boys and girls, during the actual study I planned to carry out the activities during academic lessons in which students are engaged in educational tasks similar to the activities in this study. From the pilot study I also found that the children were finding it difficult to write on a blank A4 paper and preferred a foolscap paper with lines on which to write.

Prior to the actual study, I piloted the questionnaire which was to be used during the actual study to carefully draw a sample from the large population of Year 5 students through multi-stage sampling (Refer to sub-section 3.3.2). I piloted the questionnaire with students who attend different schools other than the one in which the actual study was held. From the piloting of the questionnaire, I found out that one student found it hard to answer question four due to the categories.

These categories were changed as indicated in Table 8, such that children who watch exactly an hour or two hours of cartoons can easily select their answer. Furthermore, during piloting I noticed that some children were spending a lot of time trying to remember the names of all the cartoons that they watch. For this reason, I changed the wording in question five as indicated in Table 8.

Before piloting	**After piloting**
Question 4 categories: • Less than an hour • More than an hour • More than two hours	Question 4 categories: • Less than an hour • One hour or more • Two hours or more
Question 5 wording: "write their names"	Question 5 wording: "write some of their names"

Table 8. Questionnaire changes made after the pilot study.

A sample of the questionnaire used in the actual study following these improvements is found in Appendix A.

3.5.2 Actual Data Collection

Following the pilot study, I carried out the actual data collection activities in a different school of which the context is explained in Table 3. For this purpose, the piloted questionnaire (explained in the sub-section 3.4.1), was administered to 37 Year 5 students (16 boys and 21 girls) in this school whose parents had provided their consent for their children"s participation (Refer to Section 3.6).

Based on the students responses to this questionnaire ten students were carefully chosen through a multi-stage sampling strategy (Newby, 2014; Cohen et al., 2011) as explained in sub-section 3.3.2. These ten students participated in the rest of the data collection activities which included; drawing, writing, cartoon watching and the informal interview. These activities were carried out as explained in sub-sections 3.4.2 – 3.4.5, two weeks after the data collection from the questionnaire.

These activities were held on an individual basis, as suggested by Lewis, McNaughton, and Nicholls (2014), due to the in-depth and detailed nature of this investigation considering each individual student"s perspectives, realities and lived experiences with regards to cartoon characters. Another reason for this is that the children would not influence each other"s responses and interpretations such that each interpretation reflects the students" individual understanding and relationship with cartoon characters.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

In this research, I followed suggestions provided by Cohen et al. (2011) and Tisdall et al. (2008) in order to ensure that I have proceeded ethically throughout the research. The first step towards ensuring the adoption of ethical procedures throughout this project was to submit a project proposal to the University Research Ethics Committee (UREC) and the Faculty Research Ethics Committee (FREC).

After obtaining ethical clearance from these entities, I requested permission to carry out this research in a primary state school from the Directorate for Research, Lifelong Learning and Employability and the Foundation for Educational Services (FES). This is because as Cohen et al. (2011) suggest, after ensuring that the project is feasible, a researcher should seek to gain official permission from the institution or target community. After permission was granted from both entities, I requested gatekeepers" permission from the school Coordinators and the Head of School respectively by means of a permission letter (Appendix B). The gatekeepers" permission is important due to issues about power imbalance and coercion, as well as the child"s safety which arise when researchers approach children to undertake research (Ormston et al., 2014). After both permissions were granted, I provided the class teachers with an information letter (Appendix B) to inform them about the data collection activities and to show my gratitude for their cooperation in this research.

Following this, I requested permission from the parents of the participants by means of an information letter (Appendix B). As Cohen et al. (2011) highlight, due to the sensitivity to children"s welfare, it is vital for researchers to obtain approval from relevant adults when undertaking research with children.

In this letter I informed the parents about what the research and activities entail and that in the case that voice recordings are taken during the activities; these will be deleted as soon as the project is completed. I also ensured the parents that their children"s identity will be kept anonymous and confidential. This is because as Lichtman (2013) indicates, it is the responsibility of the researcher to keep the information confidential and the participants anonymous. For this reason, the names of the schools were never mentioned and I used fictitious names to refer to the students who participated in this study. Together with this letter, I attached a consent form (Appendix B) for the parents to provide their consent should they wish that their children participate in this research, as suggested by Ary, Jacobs, Irivine, and Walker (2018). After obtaining the parents" consent, prior to the data collection I verbally explained to the students whose parents had provided consent what the research and activities entail. I explained to them that should they choose to participate, they can stop doing the activities or ask me questions at any time during the activities, as suggested by Greig, Taylor, and MacKay (2013). I assured the students that any information collected about them will be kept confidential and anonymous.

I informed the students that in the case that voice recordings are taken during the activities, these will be deleted once the project is completed. Prior to the informal interviews, I informed the participants that the audio recorder will be placed on a table within their reach and how the audio recorder can be switched off should they wish to stop the recording. I encouraged the students to take control of the recorder as suggested by Tisdall et al. (2008), such that they feel comfortable in expressing themselves.

I also informed the students that their drawings will not be judged on their aesthetic beauty as these are all important and valuable interpretations. After the verbal explanation, I provided a recruitment letter (Appendix B) to the students such that they are also informed about the research activities in writing.

On the day of the data collection, I asked the participants if they had any questions with regards to the research. After ensuring that the participants were informed about the research I provided an assent form (Appendix B) to them such that they can provide their assent. All children assented prior to participating in the activities.

In one of the cases, during an informal interview, a child described a cartoon which in my view could have potential psychological effects on the child (Wiedeman et al., 2015). This is because Selena (Refer to table 4) described the cartoon character Bill Cipher as a demon, possessing demonic powers including; controlling people"s minds, making deals involving souls, and possessing children, which she described in great detail as discussed in sub-section 4.5.3. Apart from describing this character"s demonic powers in great detail, she also stated that this cartoon character exists in reality and that it is her dream to meet him. The student also mentioned that Bill Cipher exists in America as a statue which could come to life and that other children have taken photos with it. Based on the student"s description of this cartoon character and her relationship with it I felt that this cartoon could have a negative influence on the child"s psychology and spirituality. For this reason I informed school personnel responsible for preventing child abuse (Brassard & Fiorvanti, 2015).

The school support group took care of the child and provided the child with opportunities for liberal expression through drawings and sand pit amongst others. However, based on the feedback received by these professionals I referred to, no psychological influence was noted that could be attributed with the animated cartoon which the child described.

After researching about Bill Cipher which is featured in the cartoon Gravity Falls (Hirsch, 2012), I also found that the statue of this character indeed exists in Reedsport, Oregon and that children found it and took photos and videos with it which have been published by Jaworski (2016).

I also found that Gravity Falls (Hirsch, 2012) is a cartoon produced for Disney channel and Disney XD and it has a rating of 8.9/10 by 51,587 voters on IMDb (Gravity Falls, 1990-2019). Furthermore I found that this animated cartoon is classified as PG for parental guidance, which means that this cartoon can be viewed by the general public and "should not unsettle a child aged at around 8 years or older" (PG, 2019). However "some scenes might be unsuitable for young children" and therefore "parents are advised to consider whether the content may upset younger, or more sensitive, children" (PG, 2019). That being said, I still took all necessary measures in order to proceed in an ethical manner.

3.7 Data Analysis

3.7.1 Analysis of Questionnaires

In order to analyse the data provided by the 37 students who participated in the questionnaires, first I organised the data by inputting into Microsoft Excel 2010 software. I created five spreadsheets for the different types of data which I labelled as;

- like or dislike cartoons

- reasons for liking or disliking cartoons

- extent of cartoon watching

- types of cartoons

- production companies

I organised the data from the questionnaires into these five spreadsheets because as indicated by Burns (2010), responses to close-ended questions in questionnaires lead to quantification in terms of percentages, averages and frequencies, whereas responses to open-ended questions enable the researcher to derive themes, patters and trends.

In the first spreadsheet, I created three columns representing the range of responses which the participants could choose in the second question of the questionnaire (Refer to Appendix A) which asks them whether they like cartoons or not. The columns were labelled as „Yes", „No", and „IDK" for I don"t know. Then I counted and listed the number of participants who chose each option. This helped me in selecting the participants who were to participate in the remaining data collection activities because as stated in sub-section 3.4.1, it was important to analyse both students" positive as well as negative parasocial relationships.

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In fact, the response to this question helped me identify two students who might have formed a negative parasocial relationship (explained in Section 2.4) with cartoon characters because their response was either „No" or „I don"t know". For these reasons, and because they wished to participate in other activities, these two participants were chosen to participate in the rest of the data collection activities. Then, in order to represent the students" responses graphically, I converted the number of participants who chose each option into a percentage of the total number of participants who participated in the questionnaire (37 students). Then I used these percentages to create a graph of the percentage of students shown in Figure 17.

In the second spreadsheet which regards the students" reasons for liking or not liking cartoons, I tabulated the different responses which the students provided for their response to the third question of the questionnaire. Since some of the students answered the questionnaire in Maltese and other students answered it in English, I translated all students responses into English in order to compare the students" responses. In order to ensure conceptual equivalence i.e. that the translation is accurate, I utilised the backward translation technique described in Nurjannah, Mills, Park, and Usher (2014). The backward translation technique involves a translation from the target language back to the source language to verify the adequacy of translation (Chen & Boore, 2009). Although this translation technique has been criticised due to its focus on closeness of fit rather than on accuracy (Nurjannah et al., 2014), it is commonly used and highly recommended for translation (Chen & Boore, 2009).

Following the translation of the participants" responses, I organised the responses into columns and the students names into rows to list responses which the students provided. Since some students provided more than one reason, this helped me in choosing the rest of the students who were to participate in the rest of the data collection activities. This is because I chose students who had unique responses and other who provided multiple reasons which were similar or the same to other participants.

In the third spreadsheet I tabulated the results for questions 1 and 4 of the questionnaire regarding children"s extent of cartoon watching. I listed the students" names in rows and the days of the week in columns. Then I tabulated the number of hours which each student spends watching cartoons for each day of the week. In order to determine the approximate time that the sampled population spends watching cartoons I entered the values based on the categories as follows:

- Less than an hour → 0.5 hours

- 1 hour or more → 1.5 hours

- 2 hours or more → 2.5 hours

This helped me in determining the approximate number of hours which the students spend watching cartoons. I added the number of hours of cartoon watching for each student and took the average to determine the average time which students spend watching cartoons in a week. In order to determine the average number of hours that children spend each day watching cartoons I added the number of hours for each student per day, and took an average.

Then I used the average number of hours that the children watch cartoons each day of the week and took an average of this to determine the average number of hours that children spend watching cartoons daily. I also computed the standard deviation for each average using the Microsoft Excel formula „=STDEV".

In the fourth spreadsheet I tabulated the students" response about the types of cartoons which they watch. I entered the different cartoon names in different rows and I counted the number of students who watch each cartoon. I grouped cartoons which are watched by less than 3 students as „others" for better graphical representation. In order to represent the results graphically, I converted the number of students who watch each cartoon into a percentage and created the graph shown in Figure 13.

In the fifth spreadsheet, I entered the names of the 50 animated cartoons which the children mentioned that they watch. Beneath each animated cartoon I entered the name of the production company which produced each animated cartoon. Then I counted the number of times each production company was represented and entered the values in the row beneath.

The students" response to question 6 of the questionnaire regarding the students" willingness to participate in other activities related to cartoons was taken into consideration when choosing the participants and when tabulating the results. I highlighted students who did not want to participate in the rest of the activities in purple throughout the spreadsheets. Only one student did not want to participate in the rest of the data collection activities regarding cartoon characters.

It is important to note that the outcomes of the data from the 37 questionnaires cannot be generalised, however these provide a better indication of children‟s opinions about cartoons and children‟s cartoon watching habits, as explained in Section 4.1.

3.7.2 Thematic Analysis

In order to analyse the students‟ interpretations of their drawings and writings, I needed to consider the interpretations which they provided during the informal interview. For this reason, I chose to focus on the verbal mode (as indicated in sub-section 3.4.2) by which the children provided their interpretations and explanations for their representations.

I decided to analyse the data collected from the informal interviews using thematic analysis which Braun, Clarke and Terry (2014) define as a method for identifying, analysing and interpreting different „themes‟ in qualitative data. Freeman and Sullivan (2019) define „themes‟ as recurring concepts or ideas within a set of data which have meaning or significance in relation to the aims of the research. The main limitations of thematic analysis arise from issues when researchers represent the interpretations of others through their understanding, and the issue of language which occurs when the researcher represents the interpretations through his or her own language (Javadi & Zarea, 2016). However, according to Clarke, Braun, and Hayfield (2015), thematic analysis affords the researcher flexibility as it can be used to analyse most types of qualitative data including those originating from interviews (Refer to sub-section 3.4.4) which is why it is relevant to this study.

Moreover, thematic analysis enables researchers to obtain a more comprehensive understanding and a deeper insight into the phenomenon being analysed (Boyatzis, 1998). In order to analyse the data using thematic analysis, I followed the generic process of data analysis described in Creswell (2003) which is shown in Table 9.

Generic steps for qualitative data analysis (adapted from Creswell, 2003)	
Step 1:	Organise and prepare data for analysis.
Step 2:	Obtain a general sense of the information and reflect on its overall meaning by reading through the data.
Step 3:	Begin the coding process – organising data into categories and labelling those categories with a term.
Step 4:	Sort the categories and start generating broader categories or themes together with descriptions.
Step 5:	Think about how the descriptions and themes will be represented.
Step 6:	Derive and report the meaning or *"lessons learned"* from the data.

Table 9. Generic steps for qualitative data analysis. Adapted from Creswell, (2003).

Following the steps in Table 9 adapted from Creswell (2003), I started by typing the field notes, arranging data from different sources into different types, and transcribing the interviews. Lapadat (2000, p. 212) states that "a researcher needs to think about whether, what, and how to transcribe". The purpose of transcribing the interviews in this study was to facilitate the extraction of meaning from the data by focusing on the content present in the students" response. During transcription, I was aware that a transcript consists of a researcher"s interpretation, in this case of the interview event, and therefore it is important to "leave an audit trail" and acknowledge the decisions taken during this process (Lapadat, 2000, p. 215).

Furthermore, I was also aware that being a researcher"s interpretation, a transcript contains variations that arise from; the researcher"s analytical focus, variation in notation, orthographic variation within the same transcript, and variation in translation of languages (Bucholtz, 2007).

Although there are variations in the way transcriptions are constructed as stated in Bucholtz (2007), I adopted a style and a notation system which simplifies representation, but which maintains details of the interpretations and meanings expressed verbally. This is because as Lapadat (2000) argues, researchers" transcription systems need to reflect their data and their purposes.

When transcribing the interviews, I chose to adopt a vertical, top-to-bottom style and format representing the speaking turns, since only the students and I were talking during the interview (Refer to Appendix C). I did not include background noises in the transcripts such as the school bell ringing, as these were not required for analysis. As a notation system, I adopted the Jeffersonian transcription notation as represented in Newby (2014), however, I adapted it to suit my data, as shown in Table 10.

Symbol	Use
[text]	Indicates the start and end points of overlapping speech
(text)	Speech which is unclear or in doubt in the transcript
((italic text))	Annotation of non-verbal activity
…	Indicates a pause longer than half a second, prolongation of last letter in a word, or an unfinished utterance
"text"	Indicates quotations from children"s writings

Table 10. Transcription notation used in this study (adapted from the Jeffersonian transcription notation in Newby, 2014)

In the transcriptions, I decided to include overlapping speech in order to represent the way in which the dialogue proceeded during the informal interview. Since I quoted the student‟s writing during the interview when asking them about their writing, I included the notation of quotations ("text") so as to make a distinction from the rest of the text; between what I asked and what the children had written as shown in Table 10. Although the focus of the transcription process was on the content of the students‟ words and verbal expressions, I adopted this notation as it helped me recall the events as they occurred in great detail and thus I could represent the participants‟ interpretations better. As Jaffe (2007, p. 831) argues, "translations may take different forms depending on whether they are efforts to be „faithful‟ to „authentic‟ speech in the target versus the source language". I took this into consideration when translating the interviews in which six students spoke in Maltese and I chose to be „faithful‟ to „authentic‟ speech in the source language. For example, I translated a student‟s comment from *"Isuq fis-submarine… ji… jitla‟ fuq… (x‟jghid)… jitla‟ fuq tractor… jagħmel ir-races…"* to *"He drives in a submarine… goes… goes on… (what does he say)… goes on a tractor… races…"* (Refer to Appendix C). This is because according to Nurjannah et al. (2014), both lingual and cultural aspects need to be considered when translating. I included the students‟ quotes in the source language in Appendix C for referral purposes. The process of transcription and translation of interviews took me around three weeks. Following the organisation of data, I started familiarising myself with the data by reading it multiple times and taking notes of ideas during the process.

Then, I started generating codes by first organising data into categories in a systematic way, collating data related to each category and then labelling each category with a term (Refer to Table 9). Following the coding process, I started searching for broader categories that could be grouped into separate themes. In order to search for themes, I combined codes which are interrelated thus forming these broader categories as suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006). This analytical step helped me identify five themes from the data which are;

- Children‟s Cartoon Watching Experiences

- Children‟s Understanding of Cartoon Characters

- Children‟s View of Social Reality

- Children‟s Relationships with Cartoon Characters

- Cartoon Characters‟ Influences on Children

After organising the data into themes, I reviewed the themes by comparing them with the coded data and the full data set. This is because as Braun and Clarke (2006) state, these themes should cohere together meaningfully, however, there needs to be a clear distinction between themes. Furthermore, according to Braun and Clarke (2006), themes need to adequately capture the majority of the data whilst providing a rich interpretation of one or more aspects of the data. The final themes which I generated from the data formed the foundation on which I developed my data analysis chapter.

3.7.3 The Use of Multimodality in this Study

In this research, children communicated their understanding and relationship with cartoon characters by utilising different forms of communication including drawing, writing and speech. Each of these forms of communication conveys particular meanings better than the other forms according to the modal affordances of each mode or combination of modes (Mavers, 2003). This implies that each form of communication enables new things to be communicated, or the same things to be expressed differently (Mavers, 2003). This characteristic of multimodality (Refer to sub-section 3.2.1) allows different interpreters to draw different meanings from a particular text based on their own culture and experiences.

Since in this study the students produced their own interpretations, a multimodal framework was needed in order to compare the different children"s interpretations. Although multiple multimodal frameworks exist, for the purposes of this study, I used the MIRROR multimodal framework designed by Cremona (2017). This is because despite that the MIRROR multimodal framework was developed for critically analysing text for foreign language teaching and learning, it can be easily adapted for the critical analysis of other texts, including those relating to cartoon characters. Furthermore, as indicated in Cremona (2017), it has associated pedagogical applications and takes into consideration both multimodal and social semiotic perspectives which rarely feature in other frameworks. The steps of this multimodal framework are as follows:

Monitoring available texts and visuals (i.e., in this case cartoon character drawings) and selecting the actual texts for analysis;

Initial descriptive interpretation for each cartoon character drawing;

Representational multimodal semiotic interpretation (per individual visual);

Represented social interpretation (per individual visual);

Overview of the representations observed which compares individual trends with common trends derived from texts as a whole through a detailed write-up (where possible);

Reorganising the representations derived from MIRROR framework and presented in the overview.

The first step of this framework involves monitoring all of the available cartoon character drawings which the children produced and selecting the drawings to be analysed for the purpose of this study. The second step involves an initial descriptive interpretation for each drawing which the students provided during the drawing activity and the informal interviews. In the third step, an in-depth multimodal semiotic interpretation will be made by identifying and distinguishing the modes present in the children"s drawings. The fourth step is important as it focuses on social aspects evident in the children"s drawings. In the third and fourth steps, the multimodal semiotic and the represented social interpretations were provided by the students when talking about their drawings and during the informal interviews. This was possible because in the informal interview questions as explained in sub-section 3.4.4, I designed questions 5 and 7 to 11 specifically for the students to provide these interpretations. Following these steps, a detailed write-up of the representations present in each of the individual drawings will be made.

Where possible, a comparison will be made between individual and common trends found in all of the drawings. In the final step, the representations of the children‟s drawings derived from the MIRROR framework will be reorganised and presented in the overview. In this study, I compared the individual and common trends in the children‟s drawings and interpretations, and presented the outcomes in Chapter 4. As highlighted in Cremona (2017), when applied in practice, the steps of this framework intertwine with each other and do not necessarily follow a chronological order. Furthermore, this framework does not limit interpretation as there are no boundaries between the different levels and the user engages in a continuous process of relooping (Cremona, 2017). Apart from the purpose of critically analysing and comparing the students‟ interpretations, I used the MIRROR multimodal framework to provide multimodal suggestions based on the outcomes from the analysis of the students‟ interpretations. These multimodal suggestions consist of pedagogical activities related to cartoon characters which are based on the students‟ interest in order to enhance their learning experience. The multimodal suggestions which I developed are presented in Chapter 5 and include multimodal terms in italics which are defined in the Glossary of Terms.

3.8 Conclusion

In this section, I explained the data collection process and the research instruments which I used in order to collect the data. I discussed the research design adopted, the selection of the schools and participants, the ethical procedures, and the rationale behind the methods adopted. In the next chapter, I will be representing the outcomes of the data analysis through the themes which I identified when analysing the students‟ interpretations.

Chapter 4 – Data Presentation, Analysis and Discussion

4 Outline

After collecting the data through the activities with children as explained in Chapter 3, I analysed the data from the questionnaires, field notes and informal interviews to discover how primary children understand and relate with cartoon characters. The analysis helped me to answer the first research question which asks:

1. How do primary children understand and relate to cartoon characters?

In this chapter I will be representing the data analysis outcomes[1] of the questionnaires and the thematic analysis (Refer to sub-section 3.7.2) through the five themes identified, which were:

- Children‟s Cartoon Watching Experiences (Section 4.1)

- Children‟s Understanding of Cartoon Characters (Section 4.2)

- Children‟s View of Social Reality (Section 4.3)

- Children‟s Relationships with Cartoon Characters. (Section 4.4)

- Cartoon Characters Influences on Children (Section 4.5)

4.1 Children's Cartoon Watching Experiences

4.1.1 Children's Cartoon Watching Time

In this study, based on the results from the questionnaires administered to the 37 students, the children watch on average an hour (0.95 ± 0.60 hours) of cartoons daily and approximately 6.5 hours (6.65 ± 4.23 hours) of cartoons weekly.

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[1] The results presented in this chapter cannot be generalised, however they help to obtain a better insight of how primary children understand and relate with cartoon characters.

This result indicates that children watch on average more than an hour of cartoons daily as indicated by Li et al. (2015) and İvrendi and Özdemir (2010). However, it should be noted that the sample size in this study was too small for generalisability and the questionnaire was only used to obtain information with regards to the sampled population.

4.1.2 Animated Cartoons watched by Children

From the analysis of the data present in the questionnaire, a complete list of all the 50 animated cartoons watched by the children who participated in the questionnaire, was produced and is represented in Appendix D. Out of these 50 animated cartoons which the children watch, 12 of them were produced by Nickelodeon Studios, 10 of them were produced by Cartoon Network and another 10 of these animated cartoons were produced by Walt Disney Studios. The rest of the animated cartoons were produced by different animated cartoon production companies. This result cannot be generalised, although it indicates the popularity of animated cartoons produced by these animated cartoon companies as stated in Ahmed and Wahab (2014), Padilla-Walker et al. (2013) and Robinson et al. (2007). The rest of the cartoons are produced by different animated cartoon production companies/ studios. The data collected through the questionnaire revealed that *Tom and Jerry* was the most popular cartoon, amongst the cartoons which the 37 students wrote that they watch. This result is consistent with that obtained by Paris and Ho (2003) who also found that Tom and Jerry was the most popular cartoon. As can be seen in Figure 17, in terms of popularity, Tom and Jerry was followed by Miraculous: Tales of Ladybug & Cat Noir, Teen Titans Go, and The Amazing World of Gumball as cartoons which the children watch most.
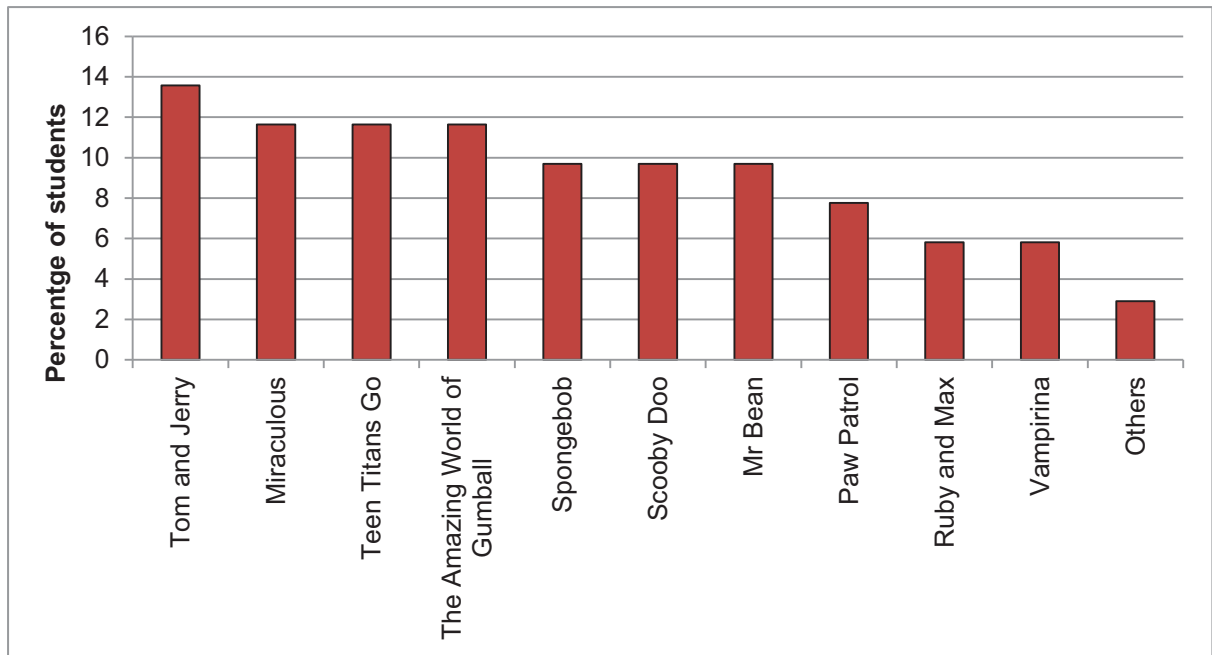
Figure 17. Percentage of students from sampled population who watch each cartoon.

Although Tom and Jerry and The Amazing World of Gumball are watched by both boys and girls, the animated cartoon Miraculous: Tales of Ladybug & Cat Noir is only watched by girls. Apart from Miraculous: Tales of Ladybug & Cat Noir, other cartoons which were popular with girls included; Paw Patrol, Ruby and Max, and Vampirina. Although there are animated cartoons which only the boys described that they watch in this study, only the animated cartoon Adventure Time was described as being watched by different boys. Although it cannot be generalised, this result suggests that the animated cartoons which the children watch include; animated cartoons intended for boys, cartoons intended for girls and cartoons intended for both. This result contrasts with Thompson and Zebrinos (1997) who suggest that the majority of animated cartoons which children watch are intended for boys.

4.1.3 Children's Opinion on Animated Cartoons

In this study, almost 95 percent (94.60%) of the children stated that they like watching cartoons whereas only around 3 percent (2.70%) of them stated that either they don"t like cartoons or they don"t know whether they like cartoons or not (Refer to Figure 18). These results agree with the claim by Kılıçgün (2015) that children enjoy watching cartoons, however such claim cannot be generalised to all children.
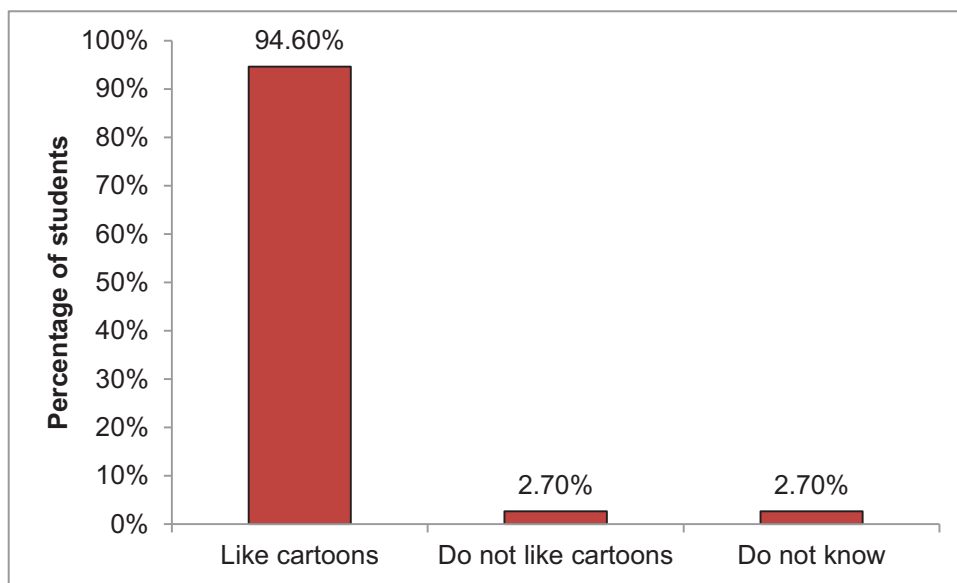
Figure 18. Percentage of students who; like cartoons, do not like cartoons, and do not know.

The reasons which the children provided for liking animated cartoons included statements such as; *"I enter another world"*, *"I love the characters"*, *"funny"*, *"hilarious"* and *"You learn a lot of things"* (Refer to Appendix D). The children"s statement *"I enter another world"* agrees with the statement by Andrienko and Kulikovskaya (2017) that children immerse themselves in the art of cartoons. The children"s statement *"I love the characters"* suggests that children are able to form positive relationships with cartoon characters as highlighted by Jennings and Alper (2016).

Furthermore, the children‟s descriptions *"funny"* and *"hilarious"* support the claim by Hoffner (1996) that humour is one of the reasons why children form such positive relationships with cartoon characters. Also the children‟s statement that they learn from cartoons supports the statement by Lenters (2018) that children are able to decode the meanings and values present in such texts.

However, Stephanie (Refer to Table 4) in the questionnaire answered that she did not like cartoons whilst Sabienne (Refer to Table 4) answered that she does not know. Sabienne who stated that she does not know whether she like cartoons or not, provided the following reason: *"I do not watch cartoons"*. This further indicates that although most children enjoy watching cartoons, some of them do not. Stephanie did not provide a reason in the questionnaire for not liking cartoons. However, these students‟ provided an in-depth interpretation of their understanding and relationships with cartoon characters which are discussed in more detail throughout Section 4.2.

4.2 Children's Understanding of Cartoon Characters

During the informal interviews, when I asked the children in which way they felt most comfortable to express themselves, the majority stated that they preferred expressing themselves through drawings. Yet, as Mavers (2011) points out, the school system is still placing emphasis on writing as the dominant mode of expression. Only one of the students preferred to express herself verbally whilst another two students preferred expressing themselves through writing. Only one student felt comfortable expressing herself through drawing, talking, and verbal expression.

Through these different forms of expressions, the students demonstrated that they understand cartoon characters in various ways. Whilst some children relate to a cartoon character without knowing its name, others are able to recall different details about the cartoon character. These details about the cartoon characters which the children described included the characters" portrayal, behaviour, particular events that the characters witnessed, and the cartoon characters relationships with each other. This demonstrates that children do acquire values, images, signs and symbols of culture when watching cartoons (Andrienko & Kulikovskaya, 2017).

4.2.1 Cartoon Character Identity and Portrayal

The data analysis suggests that the children were able to identify and describe the cartoon characters with which they form positive and negative parasocial relationships (Jennings & Alper, 2016). These children"s descriptions included who is the character they described, what creature or animal it is, and what features or attributes does it possess.

For example, when referring to the character which he drew, Sven (Refer to Table 4) demonstrated an understanding of who the character was as he said *"I drew Mickey Mouse raising his hands and he"s happy."* Sven"s drawing of Mickey Mouse is represented in Figure 19. Sven also demonstrated an understanding of Mickey Mouse"s nature and attributes as when he described his drawing, he stated: *"…Mickey Mouse"s dungaree… is red, and because he"s a mouse… he"s black."* [2]

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[2] For students" quotes in the source language (Maltese), kindly refer to Appendix C.

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Figure 19. Sven's drawing of Mickey Mouse.

Sven"s explanation agrees with the claim by Coates and Coates (2006) that children are aware of the relationships of colour and the qualities of each with regards to its visual purpose. Furthermore, it seems to indicate that Sven understands that Mickey Mouse is portrayed as black in the animated cartoon because mice are black. Another example which demonstrates the children"s understanding of the cartoon characters" portrayal is Samuel"s description of the cartoon character which he chose. Samuel explained *"I"m drawing SpongeBob"* which suggests that he knew the name of the character. Referring to the cartoon character"s colour, Samuel stated that *"he is kind of dark and yellow"* and when explaining his drawing Samuel added *"no nose because he is a sponge".*

As in Sven"s case, Samuel"s descriptions of the cartoon character demonstrate his understanding of the cartoon character"s name, features and attributes. Furthermore, like Sven who referred to mice as being black, Samuel related SpongeBob to real sponges and explained that sponges have no nose which is the reason for drawing SpongeBob without a nose. Together, Sven"s and Samuel"s cases suggest that when children experience and immerse themselves in animated cartoons they enrich their world-view as stated in Veresov and Kulikovskaya (2015).

In this study, only two students, Sarah and Sabrina, did not know the names of the cartoon characters which they described. However, Sabrina explained the character which she chose as being a *"unicorn"* and wrote *"Unicorn"* on the character which she drew, as shown in Figure 20.

Figure 20. Sabrina's drawing of the animated cartoon character which she described as a unicorn.

Similarly, Sarah described the character which she drew during the informal interview stating: *"I drew a girl from a film called Monster High: Monsters of the Deep".* In her drawing, Sarah also wrote *"MONSTER HIGH"* on the dress of the character which she drew as shown in Figure 21.

Figure 21. Sarah's drawing of the animated cartoon character which she chose from the animated cartoon Monster High: Monsters of the Deep.

Sarah‟s reason for her writing on the drawing was *"So that people who would have seen it and they do not recognise her, they will know that she is from that film".* Similarly, Sabrina‟s reason was for her writing was *"Because it is not recognisable".*

Although Sabrina did not know the animated cartoon character‟s name, she still demonstrated understanding about the animated cartoon character which she described during the informal interview. This is because she provided details about the unicorns in the cartoon such as, *"the horn on their head shines" and that "they have braided hair".* Furthermore, both Sarah and Sabrina were able to recognise the cartoon characters which they described during the cartoon watching activity. When the students recognised the cartoon characters, Sarah said *"This is her"*, whilst Sabrina said *"This is the one I like most"*. Figure 22 shows the cartoon characters which Sarah and Sabrina described in this study and which they recognised during the cartoon watching activity (Time of screenshot (left): 1:02, Link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kBhSQiO24tE; Time of screenshot (right): 4:04, Link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B7vuaEv1b24).

Figure 22. Screenshots from the animated cartoon videos in which Sarah and Sabrina recognised the characters which they described in this study.

This indicates that despite these students not knowing the characters‟ names, they were able to choose writing as a channel of communication that is best suited for them to convey meaning and provide their interpretation of texts (Literat, 2013; Coates and Coates, 2006). The children‟s choice of the different channels of communication, which Kress (2010) defines as modes, indicates that as Kress (2010, p. 1) suggests, "writing and image and colour lend themselves to doing different kinds of semiotic work".

The students" choice of modes with which to express themselves indicated their level of understanding about the animated cartoon characters which they described. For example, Stephanie told me about her description of Scooby Doo *"…I didn't know what I could write about it because I barely watch the film"*. However, this could not be generalised to all students as some students knew aspects about the cartoon characters which they found hard to express especially through drawing. For example, Sabienne explicitly stated *"I don't" really know how to draw"*. In another example, when I asked Sabrina why she chose not to draw a background in her drawing, she stated *"I don't know how to… draw trees and grass… I don't know"*. Even when describing her choice to leave the drawing in pencil, Sabrina replied *"because they have a lot of beautiful colours but I don't know how to, (sort of) draw them"*. This indicates the different children"s drawing abilities and suggests that as Coates and Coates (2006) state, children"s drawings show the stage of development of children"s creative skills, and their innate sense of visual acuity. However, as Cox (1997) suggests, although some children cannot draw something easily, as in these two cases, they can still express what they know if given a bit of help.

On the other hand, the six students who preferred expressing themselves through drawing demonstrated that as stated by Coates and Coates (2006), children are capable of creating carefully composed drawings. Furthermore, through their drawings and use of different modes (Kress, 2010), the students demonstrate different levels of understanding about the cartoon characters" portrayal. For example, in their drawings, seven children decided to give colour to their cartoon characters, whilst the other three children left the drawings in pencil.

As noted by Kress and van Leeuwen (1996) colour is a distinct mode in itself, and in the coloured drawings, it featured as a superordinate mode (Norris, 2004). This is because the children used it to provide meaning about the cartoon character"s portrayal and the way children relate with the cartoon character. The use of the mode of colour to convey meaning is indicated through the children"s drawings and their reasons. The use of colour in Sebastian and Scarlett"s drawings is represented in Figures 23 and 24.

Figure 23. Sebastian's drawing of Finn from the animated cartoon Adventure Time.
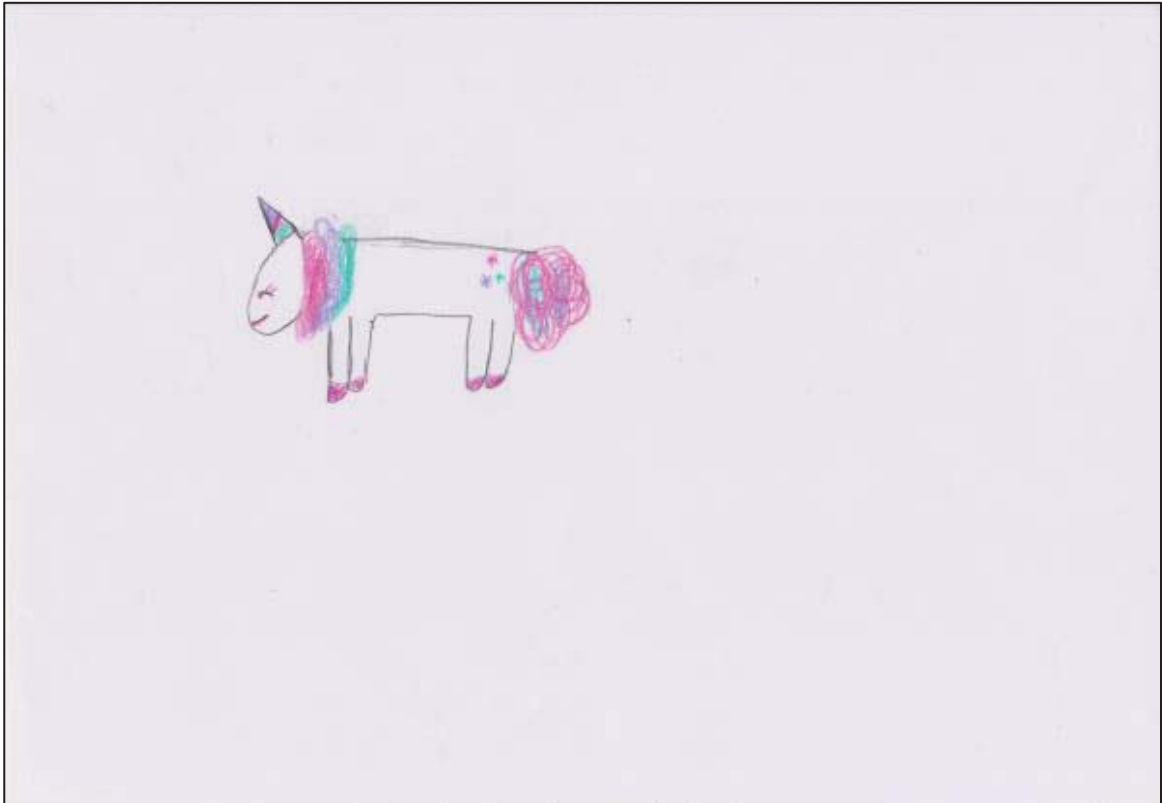
Figure 24. Scarlett's drawing of Trinket from the animated cartoon Nella the Princess Knight.

For example, Scarlett"s reason for her choice and use of colours is *"Because that"s how she looks, and… those colours are really beautiful, I like them".* The reason which Sebastian gave for his choice of colours is *"Because that is the colours of his shirt. This is the colour of his backpack"* (faithfully reproduced as said by Sebastian)*.* Therefore these reasons together with the children"s drawings indicate that the children notice the colours of the cartoon characters and understand the way in which cartoon characters are portrayed. These reasons also suggest that children are aware of the relationships of colour and the qualities of each with regards to its visual purpose, as indicated by Coates and Coates (2006).

All of these examples which the children provided, suggest that animated cartoon characters can be animals, humans, or neither as Wells (2008) describes them. These examples also indicate that, as stated in Andrienko and Kulikovskaya (2017), from watching cartoons children acquire images, signs and symbols of culture.

The children‟s descriptions of the cartoon characters with which they formed parasocial relationships, included the same attributes and behaviours as those mentioned by Hoffner (1996), such as attractiveness, humour, and strength. When describing the cartoon characters which they chose, for example Sarah wrote *"she is very sweet and funny"* and Scarlett (Refer to Table 4) described the character as *"sweet and beautiful"*. These children‟s descriptions on the cartoon character‟s beauty represent Hoffner‟s (1996) category of attractiveness. Furthermore, they may suggest that these cartoon characters portray the beauty-goodness stereotype (Bazzini et al., 2010; Klein & Schiffman, 2006) described in sub-section 2.2.2. Hoffner‟s (1996) categories of humour and strength were represented by Sebastian‟s (Refer to Table 4) description of Finn from the cartoon Adventure Time. In his writing Sebastian (Refer to Table 4) wrote *"I like this character because he is brave, funny, and he is a warrior"*. The students‟ descriptions of female characters as *"sweet and beautiful"*, and male character as *"brave, funny"* and *"a warrior"* seem to indicate that as stated in Harriger et al. (2018), Dimech (2017) and England et al. (2011), animated cartoons may still contain gendered-stereotypes. Apart from this, Hoffner‟s (1996) categories of intelligence and social behaviour were also represented by the children‟s statements in this study who said *"he‟s very clever"* and *"she obeys her owner"* when describing the cartoon characters.

However, in this study, two children also described the characters with which they positively related as being crazy, weird, famous and evil which do not fall under the attributes and behaviours mentioned in Hoffner (1996). For example, during the informal interview Selena referred to Bill Cipher, with which she related positively, stating that *"He is all evil"* and that *"he"s weird"* (Refer to sub-section 4.5.3). This is probably because Hoffner (1996) only analysed positive parasocial relationships and assumed that the children in her study liked positive attributes about their favourite television characters. However, this study does not include this assumption because both children"s positive and negative parasocial relationships with cartoon characters were analysed, as suggested by Jennings and Alper (2016). The children in this study related with cartoon characters based on their understanding of the cartoon character"s appearance and portrayal, attitudes and behaviour, nature and character, features and attributes, living environments, and social relationships.

4.2.2 Cartoon Characters' Environments

Apart from the cartoon characters" portrayal, the students" descriptions of the cartoon characters" environments also contained different levels of details. For example, Stephanie (Refer to Table 4) did not describe the environment where Scooby Doo lives and when describing the background of her drawing, she explained *"I didn"t know what I could have drawn as a background".* In fact, even if they had time to do this, none of the students drew a background in their drawing. Samantha, Sabienne and Scarlett (Refer to Table 4) only described the cartoon character"s environments verbally in minor detail, such as; *"they go to school"*, *"in his bedroom"*, or *"she"s always in different places"*.

However, other children demonstrated a thorough understanding of the cartoon character‟s environments as they provided details of where the characters live, where they go to, where they work, and activities which the characters do in these places. For example, Sebastian described the environment where Finn and Jake live as follows: *"When you go inside their tree house, they have like thousands of golden coins, and jewels, and jewellery."* Sven described the place where Mickey Mouse lives as a "fort". When I asked Sven what Mickey Mouse does in his fort, he explained: *"Meets his friends, cooks, plays… and plays with, with his dog".* Sven‟s and Sebastian‟s descriptions of the cartoon characters‟ environments suggest that students understand cartoon characters‟ environments at different levels. Furthermore, these descriptions demonstrate that animated cartoons may contain stereotypes with regards to social class as discussed in sub-section 4.3.2.

4.2.3 Cartoon Characters' Relationships

In their descriptions of cartoon characters, the children also demonstrated understandings at different levels about the different relationships which exist between cartoon characters. For example, although Sarah knew that the animated cartoon character which she drew had friends, she did not know who they are. In fact, during the informal interview, when I asked Sarah what she would tell the character if she could talk with her, she stated *"I would ask her who are her friends".* However, other students demonstrated a higher level of understanding about cartoon character relationships as they knew who the cartoon character‟s friends were. For example, Sven told me that Mickey Mouse has a lot of animal friends and Scarlett when referring to Trinket she said *"her friend, as I told you, she becomes a knight, so she can help her as well".*

Another example is Finn‟s relationship which Sebastian described as follows: *"he loves princess Bubblegum and like if somebody attacks her, he will do anything to stop it".* These examples agree with de Leeuw and van der Laan (2018) and Padilla-Walker et al. (2013) that some animated cartoon characters display prosocial behaviour i.e. voluntary behaviour that is meant to benefit another character. Furthermore, these examples suggest that children are aware of the relationships between cartoon characters. In fact, they reinforce the statement by Andrienko and Kulikovskaya (2017) that animated cartoons reveal to children the connections which exist between the unity of values including love and morality.

Stephanie and Scarlett (Refer to table 4) described a different, yet positive type of relationship between cartoon characters which exist between a pet or an animal and an owner. Stephanie described such a relationship between a pet and an owner when describing Scooby Doo as *"a dog belonging to a man"*. Likewise, when describing Trinket, Scarlett stated that *"She obeys her owner"*.

Whereas the child describing the relationship between Trinket and Nella knew that the owner was Nella the princess knight, the child describing Scooby Doo did not identify who Scooby Doo‟s owner was. These examples demonstrate that the level of children‟s understanding about cartoon characters‟ relationships varies from one student to another. Furthermore, these examples suggest that children are aware of the existence of a relationship between an owner and a pet.

The other relationships between cartoon characters mentioned by the children, were negative relationships.

A negative relationship was described by Sebastian from the cartoon Adventure Time. In his drawing, Sebastian described a thing on Finn‟s hand *"that can turn into a sword"*. Sebastian also added that Finn uses it *"for fighting cause… the ice king and there‟s the Lich that‟s like the enemy of the whole universe. The Lich he can like destroy the planet maybe…"* (faithfully reproduced as said by Sebastian). Also when talking about the enemy, Sebastian described that *"they are going to go and kill another bear, evil bear to get his head again"*. These examples suggest that children are able to distinguish between positive and negative relationships between cartoon characters. Furthermore, Sebastian‟s descriptions indicate that the cartoon *Adventure Time* contains violence and aggressive behaviour. Since according to Sven, Mickey Mouse *"races"* with cars, it also suggests that this Disney cartoon also contains aggressive behaviour. Selena‟s description of Bill Cipher that *"it killed Time Baby"* also indicates that cartoon Gravity Falls contains violence, however, Selena‟s interpretation of this cartoon character is discussed in detail in sub-section 4.5.3. These animated cartoons can be considered to include aggressive behaviour or violence because the animated cartoon characters pose a credible threat and/ or use force intended to cause harm to the other characters (Muchmore, 2014).

This indicates the importance of the suggestion by Kirkorian et al. (2008) that producers should provide appropriate guidelines and parents need to select well-designed and age-appropriate programmes for their children. Furthermore, these results indicate that as Giroux (1999) argues, educators, parents and other cultural workers like artists, journalists, writers and academics (Giroux, 2004) need to monitor and critically evaluate the potential influence that animated cartoons may have on children.

4.2.4 Cartoon Characters' Powers

During the data collection activities, the students described powers which the cartoon characters possess. Samantha described one of these powers as possessed by a villian in the animated cartoon Miraculous: Tales of Ladybug & Cat Noir. Samantha described this character as *"the one who makes the butterflies poisonous".* During the cartoon watching activity, Samantha identified this part which is shown in Figure 25, and commented *"This is where he made the butterfly poisonous"* (Time of screenshot (left): 7:19, Time of screenshot (right): 7:24, Link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l1Ov1Z3Qq3c).

Figure 25. Screenshots from the animated cartoon Miraculous in which Samantha identified the part where the villain made the butterfly poisonous.

Samantha explained that he poisons the butterflies because as she stated *"he wants to make them* (referring to other characters) *evil, take the powers, and become famous."* This child‟s interpretation represents Samantha‟s understanding of the villain‟s negative goal and the evil means by which he tries to reach that goal. Furthermore, this interpretation represents important social phenomena which are discussed in sub-section 4.3.5.

Another animated cartoon character"s power was mentioned by Sebastian who described Jake from the cartoon Adventure Time as *"a magical dog because he can talk and stretch"*. Sebastian also indicated this part during the cartoon watching activity, which is shown in Figure 26, as he stated *"Magical because he became small"* (Time of screenshot (left): 1:46, Time of screenshot (right) 1:47, Link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cLHwY9uU1MY).

Figure 26. Screenshots of *Jake* from *Adventure Time* becoming small, as indicated by Sebastian.

Sebastian described another power which *Finn* has. He explained that the green thing on Finn"s hand *"can turn into a sword"*. The student also explained that *"this turns into like a human that looks like him, and he calls it Grass Finn"*. Another example of cartoon characters" power was described by Samantha who explained that both the animated cartoon characters Ladybug and Cat Noir are able to transform into superheroes. During the cartoon watching activity she told me *"let me find a part where they become superheroes"* and she indicated the part which is represented in Figure 27 (Time of screenshot: 14:00, Link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l1Ov1Z3Qq3c).

Figure 27. Screenshot from Miraculous: Tales of Ladybug & Cat Noir where Samantha indicated that the characters become superheroes.

During the informal interview, when I asked Scarlett what she would tell the character if she could talk with it, she demonstrated interest in the character‟s power. In fact she replied that she would ask Trinket: *"If you were to transform into something, (like) in what would you transform?"* This is because as Scarlett indicated, Trinket‟s friend *"can transform"*, *"First she is a princess, then she becomes… em… like a knight"*.

Through these examples, the children demonstrated their understanding of cartoon characters‟ power, in terms of change and transformation. This indicates that these animated cartoons helped children understand abstract concepts like transformation. This is supported by Hu et al. (2011) who state that thinking in children at around 10 years of age shifts from concrete imagery thinking to abstract logical thinking.

Therefore these results agree with Andrienko and Kulikovskaya (2017) and Vygotsky (2004) that images of imagination help in developing children‟s thinking and imagination, improves their comprehension of complex ideas and provides them with an "opportunity to critically engage with important topics" (Lenters, 2018, p. 645). As suggested by Luke (2012), children can critically engage with such important topics by analysing, criticising, and transforming practices of everyday life.

4.2.5 Cartoon Characters' Stories

The students‟ understanding about cartoon characters was also reflected in their descriptions of cartoon characters‟ stories. These descriptions also indicate that the students understand such adventures at different levels. For example, Sven and Scarlett (Refer to Table 4) provided only a simple narrative of stories about the cartoon characters which they chose to describe. When referring to Mickey Mouse‟s stories, Sven only described that Mickey Mouse *"drives in a submarine… goes… goes on… (what does he say)… goes on a tractor… races…".* Scarlett only gave an example of how Trinket obeys her owner Nella, stating *"Once, she told her to bring something, and she gave it to her".*

However, other students like Samuel provided details of the episode number and what happened. For example, whilst referring to SpongeBob Samuel stated: *"Once he made a rainbow patty".* He added: *"I look at the title and when it says SpongeBob rainbow patty, it is episode 396. So far it is my favourite because out of all, it is the funniest."* This further suggests that children understand cartoon characters differently and describe them at different levels. Similar to Samuel, Sebastian also described a cartoon character story in detail.

Whilst referring to Finn‟s sword, Sebastian described: *"… in one episode, he uses it in his arm, he used it in the other arm, and then something happens and his hand disappeared. This part, turns into a human that looks like him, and he calls him Grass Finn because he is called Finn and he looks like him but made out of grass."*

Such detailed descriptions of cartoon character‟s stories tend to indicate that children immerse themselves in the art of cartoons as suggested by Andrienko and Kulikovskaya (2017). The children‟s interpretations of animated cartoons stories were all different, because as Veresov and Kulikovskaya (2015) and Ajayi (2011) suggest, such interpretations were dependent on the child‟s individual experiences. Furthermore, these interpretations suggest that through cartoon watching, children engage in meaning-making from these digital texts which serve to mediate their literacy learning as indicated by Friedrich et al. (2017).

4.3 Children's View of Social Reality

4.3.1 Friendship and Loneliness

Amongst the representations of social reality which the students described through their interpretations of cartoon characters, they included friendship and loneliness. For example, as stated in sub-section 4.2.3, although Sarah did not know who the animated cartoon character‟s friends are she demonstrated interest in the animated character‟s friendship as she stated *"I would ask her who are her friends"*. In her interpretation Sarah explained that in her drawing which is represented in Figure 21, she drew the animated cartoon character *"as if she is waving to her friends"*. Therefore, although Sarah knew that the animated cartoon character has friends, she did not know who the character‟s friends are.

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Sarah"s interpretations suggest that she understands the value of friendship and as Over (2016) explains, the need for people to form positive interactions within a social context.

Similar to Sarah"s drawing which is represented in Figure 21, Sabienne also drew the animated cartoon character alone as shown in Figure 28.
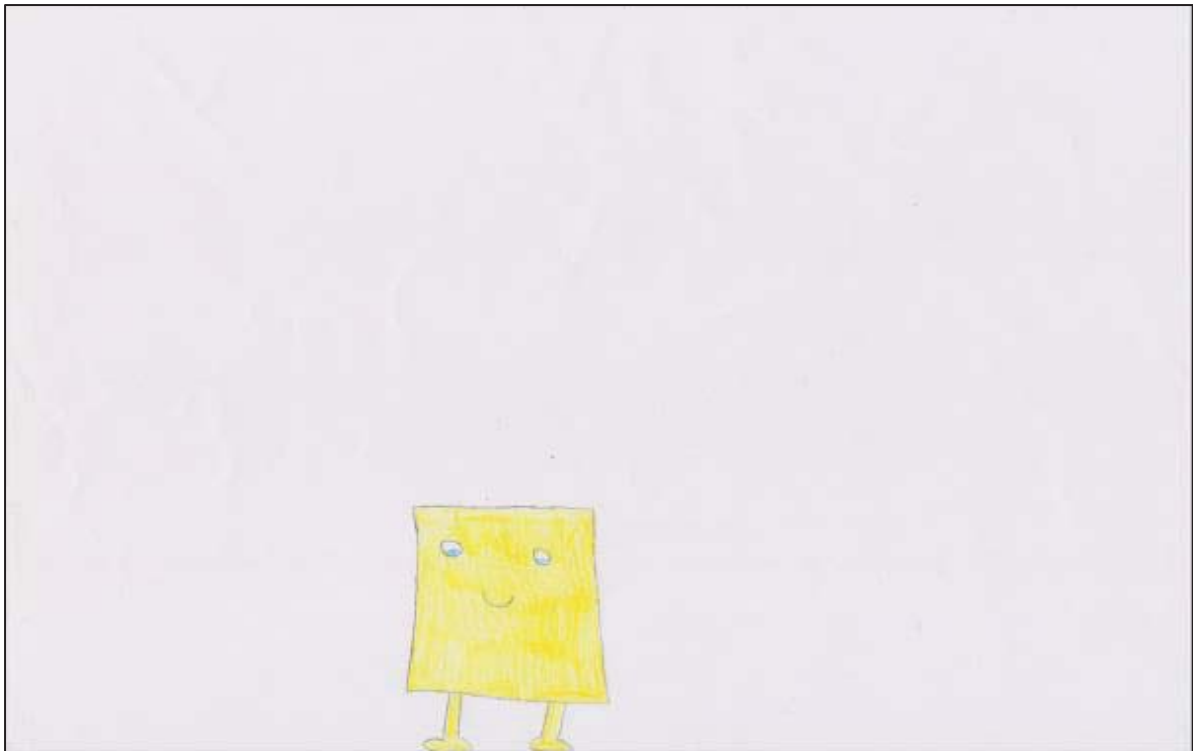
Figure 28. Sabienne's drawing of *SpongeBob*.

However, contrary to Sarah, in her interpretation of the drawing during the informal interview, Sabienne did not mention any of SpongeBob"s friends and she stated that *"he is alone at home"*. This may indicate that Sabienne"s interpretation could reflect the student"s understanding of loneliness as a relevant social phenomenon. Caputi, Pantaleo, and Scaini (2017) suggest that loneliness is linked to depressive symptoms and that it may also be experienced during childhood.

However, Samuel who also described SpongeBob, in his interpretations, referred to SpongeBob‟s friends stating *"Sandy his friend, it makes me smile"* and *"Patrick his friend says: There is always a shortcut"*. Although this indicates that students understand cartoon characters in different ways, it suggests that through their interpretation of the same cartoon character, the students were able to represent social phenomena such as friendship and loneliness.

4.3.2 Social Class

The influence of cartoon character portrayal on children‟s views of social reality and social class is also evident in the way they described the characters‟ environments and clothes. For example, the animated cartoon environment which Sebastian described was a tree house with *"golden coins, jewels and jewellery"* and that described by Sven is a *"fort"* in which the animated cartoon characters live. However, during the drawing activity, Samuel described that one of the characters *"works at the Krusty Krab"*. These examples indicate that children understand animated cartoons as linked to wealth, as stated in Keys (2016) and Towbin et al. (2004). This is because whereas Mickey Mouse, and Finn and Jake represent the upper class as they live in wealthy environments, other animated cartoon characters like that described by Samuel belong to the working-class.

4.3.3 Social Norms

Children‟s views of social reality with regards to social norms were represented through the children‟s descriptions of the animated cartoon characters‟ clothing. For example, when describing Ladybug and Cat Noir, Samantha told me that *"sometimes they go to school and they wear casual clothes"*.

Similar to this is Sven‟s description of Mickey Mouse, who told me that the dungaree that Mickey wears is *"not like in normal cartoons. The normal ones have a shorts and a top usually."* This suggests that such animated cartoon character portrayals influence children‟s understanding of social norms, behaviours, and cultures, as noted by Zurcher et al. (2018), Bazzini et al. (2010), and Baker and Raney (2007).

4.3.4 Social and Cultural Practices

Social practices refer to behaviour, activities and routines performed by a group of people as they interact together, whereas cultural practices refer to actions with symbolic meanings performed by a group of people who share similar beliefs and values (Sue, Sue, Neville, & Smith, 2019; Reckwitz, 2002). Apart from social class and social norms, social and cultural practices were also represented in Stephanie‟s drawing of Scooby Doo represented in Figure 29.
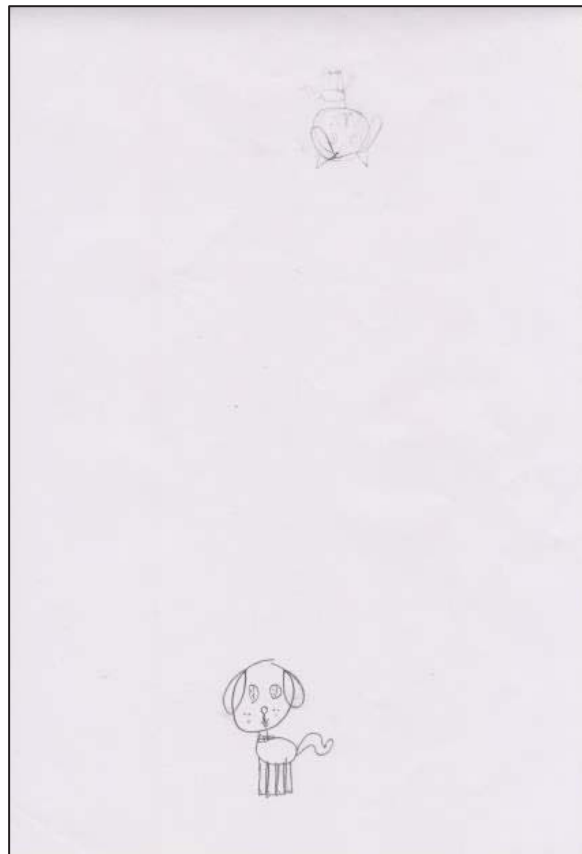
Figure 29. Stephanie's drawing of Scooby Doo.

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Stephanie explained that she drew Scooby Doo with a long tail *"because there are people who dock dogs" tails and I love long instead of short dogs' tails. It is wrong that they dock their tails and their ears because the dogs do not love it… they are afraid".* These reasons which the child provided indicate her understanding of social and cultural practices. Through her interpretation of Scooby Doo and her argument Stephanie demonstrated that she is able to form and communicate her opinion on this matter. This also suggests that through such activities regarding cartoon characters which the children enjoy, they can develop critical thinking skills as well as feel empowered to share their thoughts and feelings about socio-cultural practices.

4.3.5 Power and Fame

In sub-section 4.2.4, Samantha"s interpretation of the villain"s act of poisoning the butterflies to *"make them* (referring to other characters) *evil, take the powers, and become famous"* represents the social phenomena of power and fame. According to Mann (2012, p. 6), power represents "the ability to pursue and attain goals through mastery"s of one"s environment". Fame as a social phenomenon can be understood as "motive or behavior to seek either positive or negative public recognition on a large scale beyond one"s immediate network of friends, community, and family, independent of accomplishments in a specific endeavour", according to Uhls and Greenfield (2011, p. 316). Therefore Samantha"s interpretation of the animated cartoon villain represents both of these social phenomena. Apart from Samantha"s interpretation of the villain, Selena"s description of Bill Cipher also included fame, as she stated that *"it is really famous".*

Both of these interpretations indicate that messages about fame and power are present in the media environment, including animated cartoons as suggested by Uhls and Greenfield (2011).

4.4 Children's Relationships with Cartoon Characters

The children‟s understanding of animated cartoon characters‟ and their influences on children result in different student relationships with animated cartoon characters. As discussed in sub-section 4.1.3, the data in the questionnaires indicated that the majority of the students who participated, enjoyed watching cartoons as opposed to around 3% of the students who do not like watching cartoons or do not know whether they like it or not. The data collected from the rest of the activities with the ten students selected (Refer to sub-section 3.3.2) which included drawings, informal interviews, and cartoon watching, also indicate that children form different relationships with cartoon characters.

For example, during the interviews, Sven (Refer to Table 4) explained that he enjoys watching Mickey Mouse with his sister. When I asked Sven to provide a reason for choosing to draw this character, he answered as follows: *"Because I… like Mickey Mouse… and when I was younger, I used to watch it a lot. And what‟s it called?... and now my sister, she still watches it and I watch it with her… and I like it".*

Yet, contrary to the experience above, Sabienne who in the questionnaire explained that she does not watch cartoons, described her experience related to cartoons as follows: *"When my cousin comes at our home, and she watches cartoons, she always watches SpongeBob, and I really… don‟t like it."*

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Even though her cousin loves watching SpongeBob, Sabienne still relates to it differently. The experiences of Sven and Sabienne agree with the findings by Jennings and Alper (2016) that children are able to form both positive and negative emotional connections or imaginary relationships with cartoon characters. Sabienne"s case exemplifies how such opposing parasocial relationships (Jennings & Alper, 2016) can also form with the same cartoon character.

Stephanie (Refer to Table 4), who in the questionnaire stated that she does not like cartoons, described Scooby Doo in this study as the cartoon character which she dislikes most. However, during the activities she told me that The Pink Panther is the only cartoon which she likes. Therefore Stephanie formed a negative parasocial relationship with Scooby Doo and a positive parasocial relationship with The Pink Panther. This result indicates that positive and negative parasocial relationships (Jennings & Alper, 2016) can also be formed between the same child and different cartoon characters.

4.4.1 Gender Similarities and Differences in Children's Relationship with Cartoon Characters.

From the ten students who participated in the data collection activities, other than the questionnaire, the three boys related positively with male cartoon characters which were; Finn, SpongeBob, and Mickey Mouse. On the other hand the 7 girls who participated in the same activities described their positive parasocial relationship with both male and female cartoon characters. The male cartoon characters with which the girls formed positive parasocial relationships included; Cat Noir, Bill Cipher, and Gigi the unicorn.

The female cartoon characters with which the girls in this study formed positive parasocial relationships included Draculaura, Ladybug and Trinket. This is in agreement with Jennings and Alper (2016), whose results also indicate that boys form positive parasocial relationships with only male characters whereas girls form positive parasocial relationships with both males and females. Furthermore, only girls described negative parasocial relationships with Scooby Doo and SpongeBob which are males. This agrees with the observations by Jennings and Alper (2016) about negative parasocial relationships and gender.

4.4.2 Children's Negative Parasocial Relationships with Cartoon Characters

In this study, Sabienne and Stephanie described their negative parasocial relationships (Jennings & Alper, 2016) with SpongeBob and Scooby Doo. The students" negative parasocial relationships with these characters are based on different reasons. In Stephanie"s case, the reason behind her negative parasocial relationship with Scooby Doo was *"because boys watch it most, because the girls don"t mention that they watch it"* (faithfully reproduced as stated by Stephanie)*.* However, based on the data obtained from the questionnaire in this study, Scooby Doo is watched by 2 girls and 3 boys. Therefore, it is not the case as Thompson and Zebrinos (1997) described that children notice that the animated cartoons is intended for boys, because both boys and girls watch this animated cartoon. Furthermore, Stephanie added that she does not like Scooby Doo *"because it"s like the dog in the film can talk, and I don"t like talking animals."*

This supports Gardner and Knowles (2008) and Rosaen and Dibble (2008)"s argument that the possibility of the animated character occurring in real life, also known as social realism, is positively associated with parasocial interaction. This is because dogs cannot talk in real life and this resulted in a child"s negative parasocial interaction (Jennings & Alper, 2016) with it.

Sabienne"s negative parasocial relationship differs from that of Stephanie because of the reason which the student provided. In Sabienne"s case, her negative parasocial relationship with SpongeBob was because of *"the way he talks and the way he acts".* If Sabienne would talk with SpongeBob, she stated that she would tell him *"to… arrange the… cartoons a bit, so that I can watch them more often".*

This seems to indicate that contrary to Stephanie"s case above, in this case the child seeks to improve her interaction with the character as she affirms that she will watch the cartoons more often if SpongeBob arranges the cartoons a bit. This suggests that a child"s parasocial relationship with a cartoon character is dynamic and can change from a negative to positive relationship and vice-versa. Furthermore, it indicates that the child believes that SpongeBob is real even though Sabienne does not like it. Therefore, this indicates that social realism is positively related with parasocial interaction as stated by Rosaen and Dibble (2008). However, it also indicates that it is not only *"Love" that "makes you real"* as suggested by Gardner and Knowles (2008), but disliking a character can also make it real.

4.4.3 Children's Positive Parasocial Relationships with Cartoon Characters

The other parasocial relationships with cartoon characters, which the children described, consisted of positive parasocial relationships (Jennings & Alper, 2016). Samuel and Sven described that they have a positive parasocial relationship with cartoon characters because the cartoon characters bring them memories from earlier on in their childhood. For example, in his drawing which is shown in Figure 30, Samuel drew SpongeBob smiling.
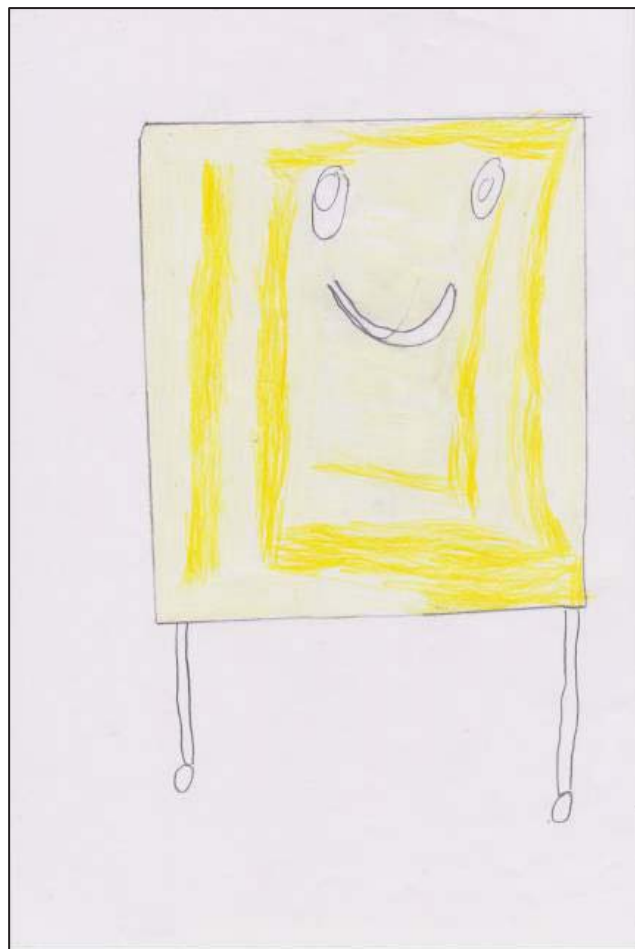
Figure 30. Samuel's drawing of *SpongeBob*.

The reason which Samuel provided for this during the informal interview was *"I love watching SpongeBob Squarepants. I laugh when I see him smile. He brings me memories of when I was a child…"*.

Similarly, Sven also highlighted that Mickey Mouse formed part of his childhood and reminds him of when he was younger. During the drawing activity, Sven explained that when he was younger, he used to watch Mickey Mouse, as even in the photos of when he was young, there was Mickey Mouse on the television, so they remind him of when he was younger.

These children"s descriptions indicate how much cartoon characters form part of their lives and how primary children may associate cartoon characters with their childhood memories. In fact, these descriptions, especially Sven"s interpretation, agree with the statement by Giroux (1999, p. 5) that Disney and other animated cartoons bring individuals to "discover some nostalgic connection to [their] childhood". Apart from demonstrating the students" positive parasocial relationships (Jennings & Alper, 2016) with these animated cartoon characters, Sven"s and Samuel"s interpretations also indicate that these characters can influence people who look at them in a positive way. This is because in Samuel"s case, SpongeBob"s smile makes him laugh and brings him memories of when he was young.

Similarly, when Sven interpreted his drawing of Mickey Mouse which is represented in Figure 19, he explained *"I drew Mickey Mouse raising his hands and he"s happy"*. The reason which he provided for this was *"because it"s like telling you Hello"*. Sven explained his use of the mode of gesture i.e. the use of hands or other body parts for communicative purposes (MODE, 2012), because according to him *"he is like waving at us"*. Another example of this is Samantha"s interpretation of her drawing of Ladybug and Cat Noir which is represented in Figure 31.
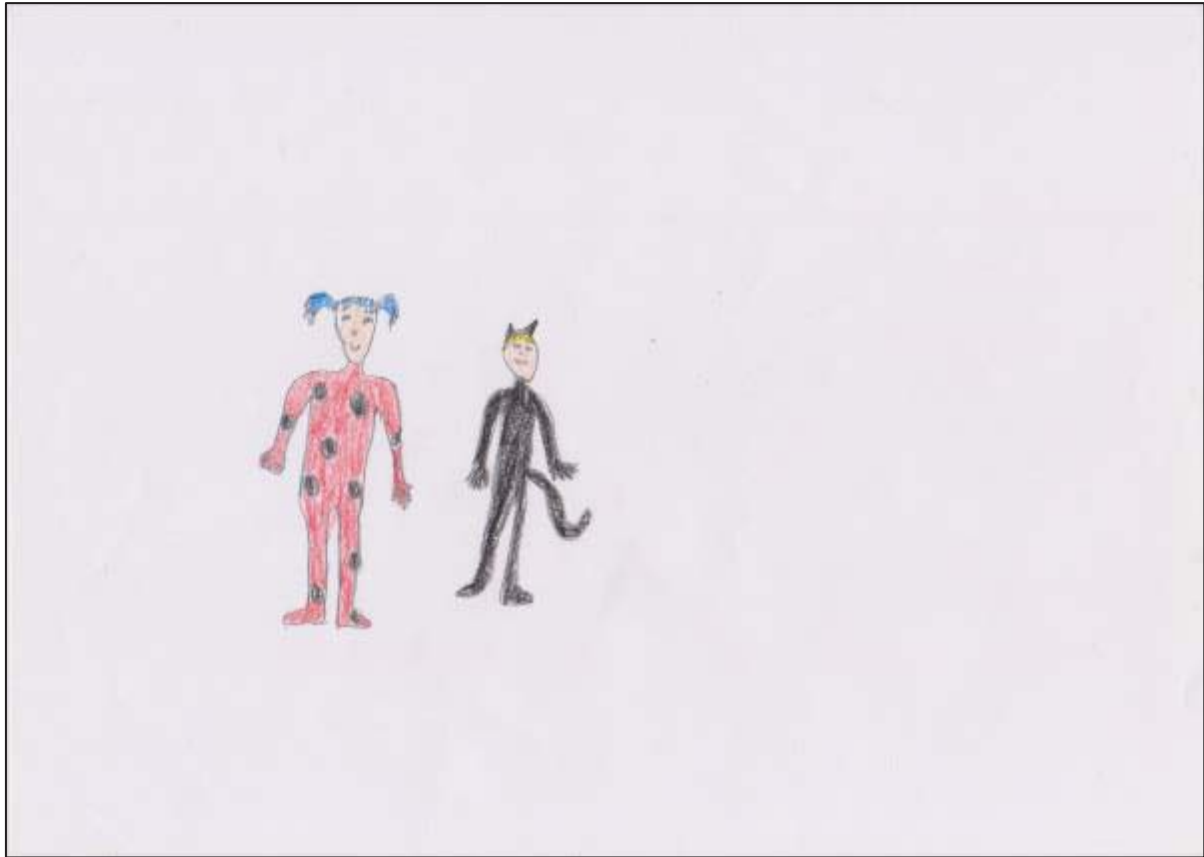
Figure 31. Samantha's drawing of Ladybug (left) and Cat Noir (right) from the animated cartoon Miraculous: Tales of Ladybug & Cat Noir.

When interpreting her drawing, Samantha stated *"I drew them looking at us so that when people look at them, they will smile as well and they will not be sad or careless"*. In both Samantha‟s and Samuel‟s interpretations, they used the mode of facial expression i.e. emotions expressed through the facial features (MODE, 2012), to indicate the positive influence that the drawn animated cartoon characters have on people. Together, these students interpretations indicate that the positive parasocial relationships formed between the students and the animated cartoon characters, can also be formed between the same characters and other people. Furthermore, in agreement with Literat (2013), the children‟s drawings together with their interpretations represent the children‟s concepts of animated cartoon characters and the emotions which the children feel towards these animated cartoon characters.

4.4.4 Animated Cartoon Characters as Real Entities

The children also described their positive parasocial relationships (Jennings & Alper, 2016) in which they indicated that cartoon characters exist in reality. Contrary to Sabienne"s case who indicated that SpongeBob exists in reality but formed a negative parasocial interaction with it, the other students described positive parasocial interactions related to the social realism of the characters. For example, Sven like Sabienne believes that Mickey Mouse is real because he stated that Mickey Mouse *"does things which I cannot do, so… like, like… instead of me doing them (the), he does them… and… he shows them in cartoons"*. However unlike Sabienne, Sven formed a positive parasocial relationship with the animated cartoon character which he described. Another example of a positive parasocial relationship in which the student believes that the cartoon character exists in reality is that described by Selena. Selena indicated that the cartoon character which she described, Bill Cipher, exists in reality. This is because she stated *"It is real"* (however, Selena"s case is discussed in detail in sub-section 4.4.2).

In another example, whilst referring to Ladybug and Cat Noir, Samantha explained *"If I see them in reality, I would congratulate them and I would do as they do."* This is because as she explained *"they save the planet"*. This interpretation suggests that Samantha believes that the animated cartoon characters which she drew exist in reality. All of these interpretations seem to agree with the statement by Gardner and Knowles (2008) and Rosaen and Dibble (2008), that social realism is positively related with parasocial interaction.

Samantha also stated *"…I would do as they do"*, which indicates that the student wants to behave like the cartoon character, a behaviour which Hoffner (1996) describes as wishful identification. Another example of children"s wishful identification in this study was that provided by Sebastian who stated that he would like to live in a tree house as Finn and Jake. This suggests that the child wishfully identifies (Hoffner, 1996) himself with the characters as he wants to live in a similar environment like the one in which these animated cartoon characters live.

Apart from his wishful identification with the animated cartoon characters, as in the example above, Sebastian also indicated that these characters exist in reality. In fact, when replying to question 4 during the informal interview, he answered: *"I would tell him that he"s my favourite character from the cartoon, and maybe, like my name and stuff so we can like go somewhere maybe. I think I"ll go to the, it"s like a special forest that"s made out of candies"*. Similarly, Sabrina answered question 4 during the informal interview stating *"I would tell the unicorn that she"s beautiful so that we play together… or if she wants, to live at my house"*.

All of these children"s interpretations support Gardner and Knowles (2008) and Rosaen and Dibble (2008)"s argument that when children demonstrate affection and love towards a particular character, this character is perceived as more real. However, such perception that animated cartoon characters exist in reality can also occur when children develop negative parasocial relationships with them, as discussed in Sabienne"s case in sub-section 4.4.2.

Furthermore, these children‟s interpretations indicate that animated cartoons help in developing children‟s imagination and in providing inner language for real feelings, as suggested in Veresov and Kulikovskaya (2015) and Vygotsky (2004).

It should also be noted that these results cannot be generalised to all students as not all of the children described animated cartoon characters as being real. In fact, contrary to the examples above, Stephanie described how Scooby Doo cannot be real because as she stated *"the dog in the film can talk".* Therefore, this suggests that some children like Stephanie, are able to distinguish between imagination, fiction and reality quite well as stated in Veresov and Kulikovskaya (2015). However, other children like those who interpreted cartoon characters as existing in reality, may be unable to differentiate between fantasy and reality as indicated in Nwabueze and Okonkwo (2015). Consequently, these finding agree with Nwabueze and Okonkwo (2015), that responsible adults may need to dedicate ample time to help their children discriminate between reality and what they watch in animated cartoons.

4.5 Cartoon Characters' Influences on Children.

During the data collection activities, the students‟ interpretations of cartoon characters indicated potential influences that these characters may have on children. The cartoon characters‟ influence which the students described in this study consisted of both negative and positive influences.

4.5.1 Addiction to Cartoon Watching and Cartoon Character Merchandise

Among the negative cartoon character influences which the children described, Sabrina told me about her addiction to watch unicorn cartoons. Sabrina explained how the cartoon influenced her, as she stated: *"When I started watching it for the first time, I got addicted and I still watch it to this day".* Sabrina explained addiction stating that *"It‟s like I started seeing a lot of beautiful things and I still watch it today".* Although Sabrina described her addiction to watching unicorn cartoons, analysis of the data in the questionnaire suggests that she watches around 4 hours of cartoons per week. Therefore, this indicates that educators need to investigate their students‟ reported addiction to cartoons. This is because although in this case, the child watches less cartoons than the average of 6.5 hours weekly obtained in this study, as Nwabueze and Okonkwo (2015) highlight, it is possible that children become addicted to animated cartoons as well as to cartoon character merchandise.

In fact, Sabrina also told me *"I have a soft toy which is a unicorn. Its‟ name is Emma, and I have had it for 7 weeks… My mum noticed me drawing them a lot, and she bought it for me, and I became fixated about unicorns."* She explained her fixation about unicorns stating that *"because I love watching the cartoons when I go to my grandma and I watch it immediately after school, then I do my homework".* This interpretation indicates that cartoon characters are also featured in children‟s marketing products and merchandise as stated in Dickie and Shuker (2014) to which children can become addicted (Nwabueze & Okonkwo, 2015). Furthermore, it also indicates the important role of parents and grandparents (Griggs et al., 2010) in monitoring and selecting well-designed and age-appropriate programmes for their children (Kirkorian et al., 2008), to safeguard their well-being and prevent addiction.

4.5.2 The Negative Influence of Cartoon Environments on Children's Diet

The children‟s descriptions of cartoon character environments also demonstrate what Lacroix (2004) and Giroux (1999) stated about cartoon characters potential influence on children‟s attitudes, values, beliefs, and behaviour. For example, Sebastian described a cartoon characters‟ environment stating that *"it‟s like a special forest that‟s made out of candies"*. Sabrina described a similar cartoon characters‟ environment stating that *"their planet is beautiful and full of sweets"*. In the cartoon watching activity, Sabrina identified this planet full of sweets, which is represented in Figure 32, stating that *"This is their (home)"* (Time of screenshot: 14:54; Link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B7vuaEv1b24).

Figure 32. The planet full of sweets which Sabrina identified in the cartoon watching activity.

Since these cartoon environments portray candies, they may potentially affect children‟s snack preferences and children‟s diet as noted by Gauci et al. (2015), Kraak and Story (2015), and Henry and Story (2009).

4.5.3 Potential psychological Influence of Cartoon Characters on Children

Animated cartoon characters can also have potential psychological influences on children as indicated by Wiedeman et al. (2015). As I explained in Section 3.6, in this study, Selena described a cartoon character, Bill Cipher which in my view could have potential psychological influences on children. This cartoon character is Bill Cipher from the animated cartoon Gravity Falls, which was described by the child as having a dual nature, both as a creature and as a statue. The child also explained that in reality he is found in America as a statue, however when he is alive he can live in the minds of people.

As in the cases mentioned in sub-section 4.4.4, Selena explained that Bill Cipher exists in reality. She explained *"I believe that Bill Cipher is real, because I saw a lot of people who took photos with him and uploaded them… on the internet… This means, he is real"*. Selena explained *"They found him a statue!!! And they new how to get him a life again but they did not make him a life because they newed that he is bad as a Demon"* (faithfully reproduced, as written by Selena) [*They found him as a statue, and they knew how to get him alive again, but they did not make him alive because they knew that he is as bad as a demon*]. This is because as she explained, Bill Cipher is referred to as a *"one-eye demon"* and possesses several powers. She also mentioned that people can bring it back to life, as she explained during the informal interview *"Alive, how to make it alive, you can make a deal with it. And if, because it‟s a statue how you can make a deal with it… you only have to grasp it‟s hand, and you tell it it‟s a deal… and it‟s alive once again"*. For these reasons I decided to represent this case separately from the others.

This is because following the suggestion by Baxter and Jack (2008), a better understanding of the phenomenon addressed in this study, is obtained through treating this case separately. As can be seen in Figure 33 below, the child demonstrated an accurate understanding of the cartoon character‟s attributes and portrayal.
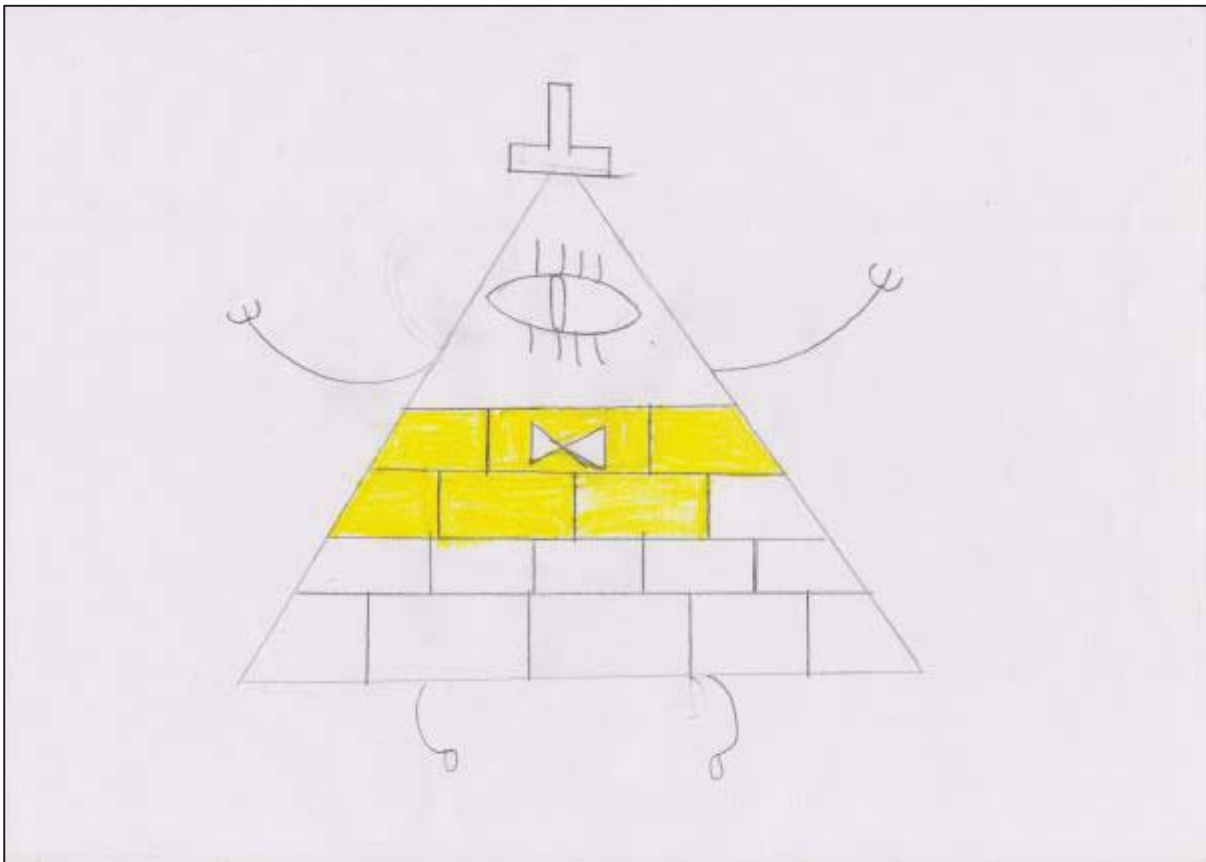
Figure 33. Child's drawing of the cartoon character *Bill Cipher* from *Gravity Falls*.

When describing the character, the child told me that it is weird, referring to its gender portrayal. In fact, she explained *"…he is not a girl, he is a boy. But he‟s like this because he‟s weird… he has one eye, triangle, bow tie, his eye, the eyelashes".*

This indicates that as Wells (2008) suggests, through the portrayal of animated cartoon characters with human characteristics, animators can depict performances of gender. Furthermore, Selena‟s interpretation agrees with Harriger et al. (2018), England et al. (2011) and Lacroix (2004) that whereas previous Disney animated films included gender-stereotyping, nowadays Disney has reduced the portrayal of gender stereotyping in its animated cartoons.

Selena‟s parasocial relationship with Bill Cipher differs from the other cases because she love this animated cartoon character despite that she describes him as *"really really really evil"*. Through her writing, Selena described her positive parasocial relationship with this character, stating *"I love this creatur Bill Cipher because he is the Master of minds, strong, have powers witch are very cool and because he is a cool mystery!!! Bill Cipher is real!!!!!!!!"* (faithfully reproduced as written by Selena). Amongst the powers which Bill Cipher possesses, during the informal interview Selena described that; *"It can instantly burn whatever it wants"* and *"it can kill instantly, in a second, it kills"*. During the drawing activity, Selena described a story which includes another of Bill Cipher‟s power: *"The children had puppets and Bill Cipher came for a boy. The boy was entering a password. Bill Cipher told him that he can tell him the password but he had to give him a puppet. He was referring to the boy‟s soul. Then they made a deal, and he removed all of the boy‟s soul and entered his body, but the boy was still alive but he was a ghost."*

These examples represent the child‟s understanding about this character and reflect the character‟s negative behaviour, attitudes and relationship with other characters. They also indicate that the cartoon Gravity Falls is aggressive and violent (Muchmore, 2014) since Bill Cipher poses threats and causes harms by killing others. In fact, Selena described such violent and aggressive behaviour when describing Bill Cipher as she stated *"… when it does weirdmageddon, it killed Time Baby"* (faithfully reproduced). Yet, despite the child‟s understanding about this cartoon character and his demonic powers to make deals involving the soul, during the informal interview she *stated "…my dream is to go to America, search for it and have an adventure. Adventure, even if it‟s dangerous I don‟t care"*. During the informal interview Selena also described that she would make a deal with this character. The reason which she provided is *"because if I make a deal with it, I will have an adventure"*. She also added *"I‟m not afraid of it... It will be my pleasure because he will be real and he will enter my mind and sees everything… Because it would have entered my mind, I will know that it is inside my mind, and… sort of because I really love it, and I want him to enter in my mind."*

This case demonstrates the complexity of children‟s understanding and relationship with cartoon characters as the child loves this cartoon character despite knowing that it is *"really really really evil"*. It also indicates that children‟s parasocial relationship with cartoon characters is based on a more complex understanding than through the general character attributes mentioned by Hoffner (1996). Since Selena loves the character *"because it has mystery"*, it suggests that her relationship with the character is based on her curiosity about Bill Cipher as a phenomenon.

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Therefore, such curiosity enabled the child to form an intense positive parasocial relationship with the character, which in turn motivated her to learn more about the character and to understand it better.

As in the other cases, Selena‟s interpretation of her parasocial relationship with Bill Cipher supports the claim by Gardner and Knowles (2008) and Rosaen and Dibble (2008) that social realism is associated with parasocial interaction. This is because according to the child the character exists in reality and she wants to meet with it. It also indicates the child‟s understanding of the cartoon character‟s influence on her, however, the child does not care about the dangers which such an adventure might have on her. This indicates that exposure to violent or aggressive cartoons, can negatively impact children‟s values, attitudes, and behaviour as stated in Murray (2008). This case also suggests that educators and parents need to consider how Disney animated cartoons influence children‟s culture, attitudes, values, beliefs, and behaviour, as indicated by Giroux (1999). It also indicates that parents and guardians need to educate their children about differences between reality and what they watch on cartoons as sugggested by Nwabueze and Okonkwo (2015).

4.5.4 Informal Learning from Cartoon Characters

Although cartoon characters can have negative influences on children, they can also have positive influences. For example, during the writing activity, when referring to the animated cartoon Monster High: Monsters of the Deep¸ Sarah wrote: *"The story is wonderful and I think that the movie is very good to make children learn things from it."*

In fact, Sarah‟s interpretation agrees with Lenters (2018) and Andrienko and Kulikovskaya (2017, p. 42) who state that as children watch cartoons, they learn to "decode the deeper meaning of values hidden in them". In describing what she learnt from this animated cartoon, Sarah said *"For example, if your friend is better at something which… you do together… it does not mean that because she is better, you do not remain friends".*

This suggests that Sarah acknowledges the value of friendship as discussed in sub-section 4.3.1. Sarah‟s interpretation also indicates that animated cartoons reveal to children the connections existing in the unity of values which are especially important in the modern world, as stated in Andrienko and Kulikovskaya (2017). Therefore, parents can indeed strengthen the moral messages that prosocial cartoons mediate to children as stated by de Leeuw and van der Laan (2018).

4.6 Conclusion

From this analysis based on the themes which I identified, I can conclude that most children enjoy watching animated cartoons although this cannot be generalised to all students. The analysis also indicated that children are able to form both positive and negative parasocial relationships as indicated by Jennings and Alper (2016). Moreover, it suggests that children understand cartoon characters and relate with them in different ways depending on the cartoon characters‟ identity and portrayal, attitudes and behaviour, nature and characteristics, features and attributes, living environments, and social relationships.

The students" interpretations indicated that animated cartoon characters influence their view of social reality and they can have negative influences on children including addiction to cartoon watching and cartoon character merchandise, violence and aggressive behaviour, diet and snack preferences, as well as potential psychological influences. However, it can also be concluded that children can learn from animated cartoon characters. From this analysis, I derived pedagogical suggestions for primary educators which I will discuss in the next chapter.

Chapter 5 – Multimodal Suggestions

5. Outline

From the themes which I identified and analysed in the Data Analysis chapter, I will be suggesting ways in which cartoon characters can be used by educators so as to make their lessons more engaging for students. In this chapter, I will be providing suggestions on ways in which educators can incorporate cartoon characters in light of the outcomes of the data analysis and the literature. The suggestions which I will be providing are examples to demonstrate how animated cartoon characters can be used effectively in different primary education lessons within the different curricular subjects. These suggestions include multimodal terms in italics which are defined in the Glossary of Terms. It should be noted that the same principles behind these suggestions can be applied to different subjects and can also be adapted for primary students of different age groups. Despite that the suggestions which I will be providing in this chapter focus on the use of animated cartoon characters, it should be noted that I also provided other suggestions without the use of these characters. I acknowledge that educators have time constraints, as highlighted by Ryan et al. (2010), and that the syllabus content is vast within each subject area (Male, 2012; Ruddock, et al., 2008). However, the suggestions which I provide, are all tied to curricular aims and therefore I believe that in order for students to authentically enjoy learning experiences involving animated cartoon characters, there needs to be a balance and a variety of activities and experiences as suggested by Darling-Hammond (2006). This means that animated cartoon characters will not be used in each and every lesson because this would lead to a routine and the elimination of spontaneity.

5.1 Using Animated Cartoon Characters during Lessons

The first suggestions are based on the use of animated cartoon characters during lessons within the classroom context, but I will also highlight how related work can be carried out by the students at home as part of their homework. This is because according to Hagger, Sultan, Hardcastle, and Chatzisarantis (2015) homework is an important means by which teachers can assess students" adoption and application of learning beyond the classroom.

5.1.1 Teaching 2D Shapes in Mathematics

Shape, space and measures - Euclidian Geometry
(http://www.schoolslearningoutcomes.edu.mt/en/subjects/mathematics)

Learning outcomes: Till the end of this lesson, the students will be able to:
1.   Identify different 2D shapes.

2.   Use 2D shapes to create a collage.

The data analysis suggested that the majority of the students like cartoons, however as discussed in sub-section 4.1.3, this could not be generalised to all students. Therefore, in order to introduce this Mathematics lesson about 2D shapes, teachers can show a picture of SpongeBob and another one of a castle to the students, as represented in Figure 34. Picture of SpongeBob was retrieved from: https://SpongeBob.fandom.com/wiki/SpongeBob_SquarePants_(clones)?file=SpongeBob%20SquarePants(copy)0.png, whilst picture of castle was retrieved from: http://kthompson114t.weebly.com/blog/shape-resources.
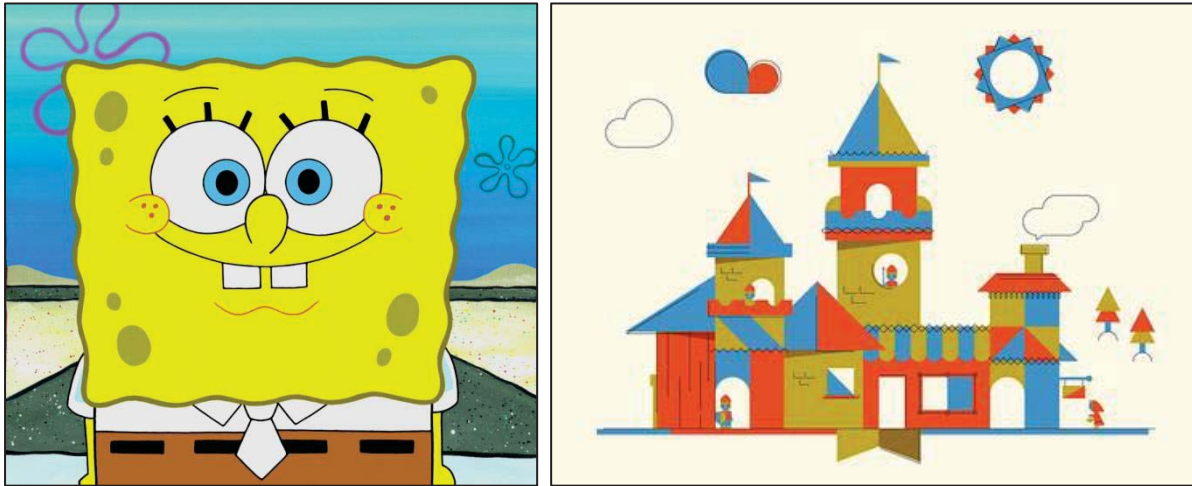
Figure 34. Picture of SpongeBob and a castle made out of 2D shapes.

The students need to work in pairs for this introductory activity and they need to list the 2D shapes which they identify from each picture on a „mini whiteboard‟. This activity links with the following activity in which the students need to find objects in the classroom which have the 2D shapes that they identified.

For instance the students can mention that the classroom clock has the shape of a circle, or that the classroom curtains or books have the shape of a rectangle. This activity could be carried out in groups in the form of a competition. Each group will need to find as many different objects in the classroom as they can, which have a particular 2D shape. The group which lists the most classroom objects having a particular shape wins. As suggested by Kutnick and Blatchford (2014) group work helps in improving students‟ attainment in reading and Mathematics.

In order to consolidate the students‟ learning of 2D shapes, following these identification activities, the students need to choose a subject, which could be a castle of a Disney Princess, Mickey Mouse‟s fort, or a cartoon character of their liking.

Then they need to create a collage of the subject which they chose, making use of coloured cardboard or everyday items which have 2D shapes. An example of collages made out of 2D shapes is shown in Figure 35 (Image retrieved from: https://childhood101.com/hands-on-activities-for-learning-about-2d-3d-shapes/).

Figure 35. Example of a collage made out of 2D shapes.

This activity helps children to relate the 2D shapes with objects from different contexts and provides them with an opportunity to express themselves through different modes other than writing. This is important because as Coates and Coates (2006) state, children are able to create carefully composed pictures and in the data analysis most of the students preferred expressing themselves through drawing, as discussed in sub-section 4.2.1. Therefore, according to Mand (2012) and the Ministry for Education and Employment (2012) such activity is student-centred as it provides the students with a learning experience in which the students choose both their subject for creating the collage as well as which modes to use for their expression.

Moreover, comparison of the students" interpretations through the MIRROR multimodal framework (described in sub-section 3.7.3), indicated that students understand that animated cartoon characters live in different environments which reflect their social class (Refer to sub-section 4.3.2). Therefore, this activity involving 2D shapes in the form of collages can be developed by educators into a discussion of different houses or buildings in different countries especially in culturally diverse classrooms. Furthermore, this activity can also be continued as part of homework if the students do not manage to finish it in class and thus provides certain flexibility with regards to time management.

5.1.2 Teaching Languages

Writing in everyday life, use of grammar and literature: Learning Outcome 17 (http://www.schoolslearningoutcomes.edu.mt/en/subjects/maltese)

Learning outcomes: Till the end of this lesson, the students will be able to:

1. Write an interview

2. Enact and film the interview

In order to consolidate students" learning of an interview structure, the students can be asked to choose an animated cartoon character or another character which they like. In order to introduce the lesson, the teacher can provide a toy microphone to the students and they need to practice the structure of an interview in turns. During each turn, a student needs to ask a question to another student whilst the other student needs to reply. During each turn, the other students need to guess who is the interviewer and who is the interviewee.

Following this introductory activity about what constitutes an interview, the students need to create a mind map on their learnpad in order to prepare for the interview write-up. As noted by Widiana and Jampel (2016), mind mapping is a technique which stimulates children"s mind to think actively and is a suitable way for the students to record their creative ideas. Before the students create the mind map, the teacher will show them an example of a mind map which is represented in Figure 36.
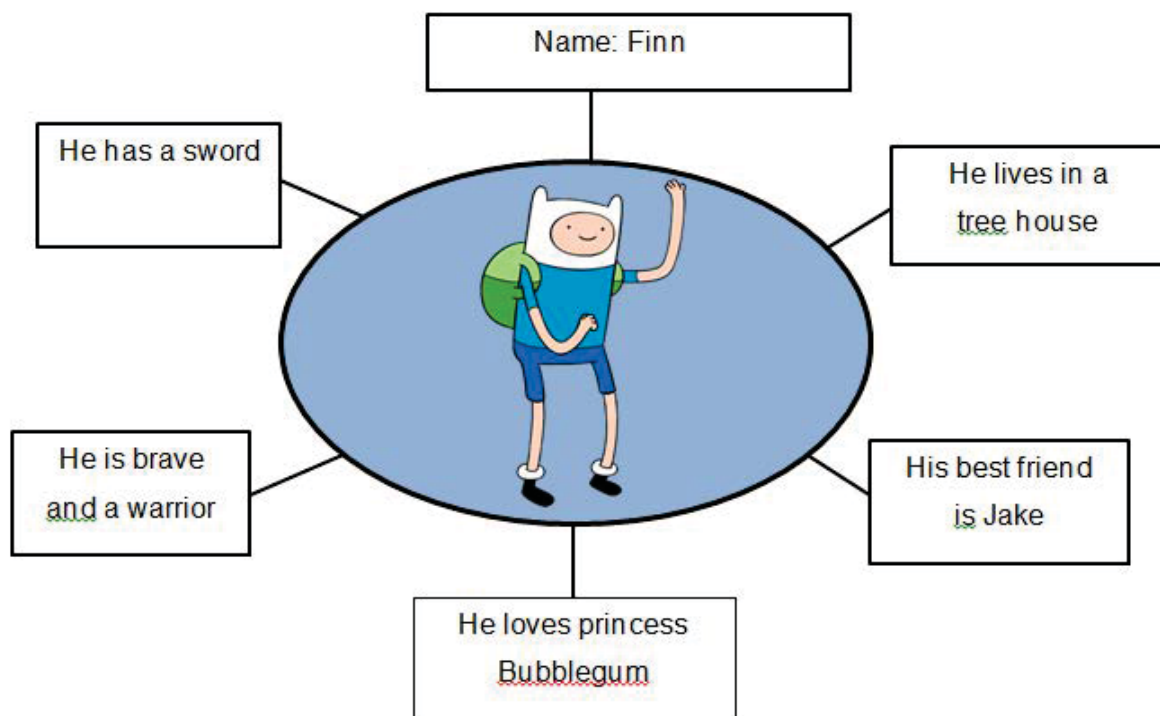
Figure 36. An example of a mind map with information about Finn which can be used when writing the interview. The information is based on the interpretation by Sebastian in this study.

In the mind map, the students can write information such as the character"s; portrayal, identity, environment, power, and relationships similar to the students" interpretations in Section 4.2. Following the brainstorming activity on the mindmap, the teacher will provide a handout to the students so that they can write the interview in pairs.

Name:_____   **Year:**_____

<u>Writing an interview</u>
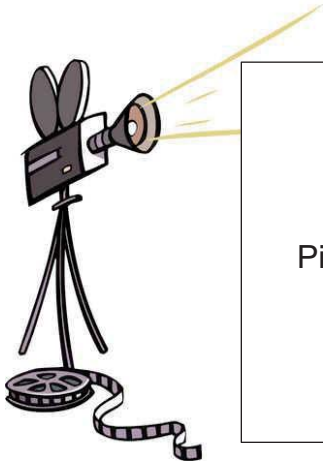
Picture of character 1	Picture of character 2

Interviewer:_____   **Interviewee:**_____

*<u>Interviewer:</u>*_____*?*

*<u>Interviewee:</u>*_____

_____*?*

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____
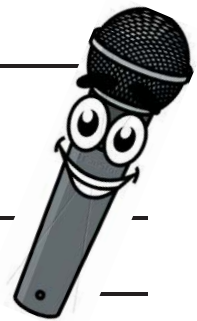
The interview needs to include both characters which the pair of students would have chosen. These characters could be an animated cartoon character and a footballer for instance. The students need to either glue a picture or draw the character which they chose on the handout. Then they need to write the questions and replies by the interviewer and interviewee respectively. The teacher needs to explain that instead of interviewer and interviewee, the students need to write the characters‟ names, and that the students need to write the punctuation as shown in the first examples on the handout.

Once the students write the interview in pairs, they can enact and film the interview. In order to make the interview more interesting for the students, they can wear masks of their characters which they would have prepared during an Art and Craft lesson. When filming the interview, the students can use the camera of their learnpad to record the interview. Each student needs to represent the character which he/ she chose either by being the interviewer or the interviewee. As stated in Ajayi (2011) and Gee (2004), such an activity helps in developing students‟ critical literacy because the learners are providing their interpretation of an interview through the different characters which they chose and through different modes, including *writing*, *image*, *gestures* and *speech* when filming the interview.

5.1.3   Teaching Music, Drama and the Creative and Expressive Arts

Developing, widening and harnessing of knowledge in music: Learning Outcome 1
Responding to music: Learning Outcomes 1-2
(http://www.schoolslearningoutcomes.edu.mt/en/subjects/music)

Performing Drama: Learning Outcome 3

 (http://www.schoolslearningoutcomes.edu.mt/en/subjects/drama)

Learning outcomes: Till the end of this lesson, the students will be able to:

1.	Listen and appreciate different genres of music

2.	Create and imitate movement

A cross-curricular lesson including elements from Music and Drama can be developed using animated cartoon characters. Such a lesson can be introduced by playing different songs featured in Disney animated cartoons available through the following link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KkBZRnBaBV0. This link includes Disney songs like; "Under the Sea" (Menken & Ashman, 1989), "He lives in you" (Mancina, Rifkin, & Lebo, 1998), "A Whole New World" (Menken & Rice, 1992), and "Reflection" (Wilder & Zippel, 1998). The benefit of using these Disney songs is because, as highlighted by Padilla-Walker et al. (2013), Disney animated cartoons have received continued popularity. In fact Disney"s popularity amongst children was also indicated in this study because as discussed in sub-section 4.1.2, Disney animated cartoons were amongst the most popular cartoons which children watch. Apart from Disney songs, the teacher can use other songs which are popular with the students, including modern local songs such as "Hey Now" which is sung by Ira Losco and Owen Leuellen. The use of the MIRROR multimodal framework indicated that students understand cultural practices as discussed in sub-section 4.3.4. Therefore, through incorporating music from different cultures in such an activity, educators can develop students" appreciation of different music, respect and construction of self-identity as indicated by Nethsinghe (2012).

Furthermore, such use of music from different cultures enables critical literacy teaching (Luke, 2012) because through the use of these resources which are composed of multiple channels of communication, children can analyse, criticise and provide their interpretations of these texts. In fact, Behrman (2006) suggests that in order to teach critical literacy, teachers need to use works of fiction, non-fiction, films and popular culture apart from traditional textbooks.

Whilst playing the songs during the introductory activity the students need to listen and they can also guess in which Disney animated cartoon the song was featured or who sings the song if it was produced by a Maltese artist for example. Following this introductory activity, the students need to form groups of around four students. Each group needs to choose one of the songs which the students would have listened to. According to Alderman, Beighle, and Pangrazi (2006), when learners are provided with options to choose from, their motivation to participate in the activity increases.

After each group of students selects a song, the teacher will play the song chosen by the first group. The students in the first group need to create movement according to the song as stimulus whilst the other groups need to imitate the movements of the first group. Then the second group becomes the leading group and the activity continues until each group of students have a leading role in creating movement whilst the others imitate them. According to Rothwell (2011), students need to experience the bodily aspects of communication as part of authentic, multimodal interaction.

In fact, in this activity, the students interact through *speech*, *gesture* and *facial expressions* which Kress (2010) considers as different modes of communication. Furthermore, such an activity in which learners make meaning of texts through drama, engages students creatively, emotionally, physically and cognitively through the interplay of the body and mind according to Ntelioglou, (2011).

In order to conclude this lesson, the teacher can ask the students to describe which movements they liked, why they preferred a song from another, and which feelings did they feel when listening to the songs and creating or imitating movement. Through answering these questions the students would be reflecting on what they have learnt as well as practising their language learning. This is because as Winston and Stinson (2016) state, drama helps in the contextualisation of language and it has the benefits of promoting motivation and enthusiasm in learners.

5.1.4 Teaching Science and Social Studies

How does planet Earth support Life? Learning Outcome 10
(http://www.schoolslearningoutcomes.edu.mt/en/subjects/science)
Populations, Development and Environments: Learning Outcome 5

Learning outcomes: Till the end of this lesson, the students will be able to:

1.   Identify and describe seasonal changes

2.   Explain how seasonal changes affects our lives

Educators may develop a cross-curricular lesson on weather changes and seasonality which integrates content from Geography and Science. The teacher may introduce the lesson by asking the children which is their favourite season.

The students can then raise their hands when choosing a particular season such that they can count how many students prefer each particular season. They also need to state a reason why they prefer a particular season as this helps them in practising language. After this introductory activity, the teacher will show the images of animated cartoon characters wearing different clothes depending on the season, as represented in Figure 37 (Images retrieved from: https://www.pinterest.com/pin/160018592995492683/).

The students need to identify and describe the differences between the images of the cartoon characters in groups of around four students. Each group needs to make a list of the differences that they can observe. Then the observations of each group will be compared by the students such that the students describe how the seasonal changes affect our lives. This can form the basis for the following activity which can take the form of a discussion. In this activity, the students need to relate what they have observed to real-life situations. In culturally diverse classrooms, educators can also provide the opportunity for students from different countries to discuss and compare the climate and seasonal changes in the countries where they come from. This will contribute to a richer students" understanding of seasonal changes and how these affect our lives.
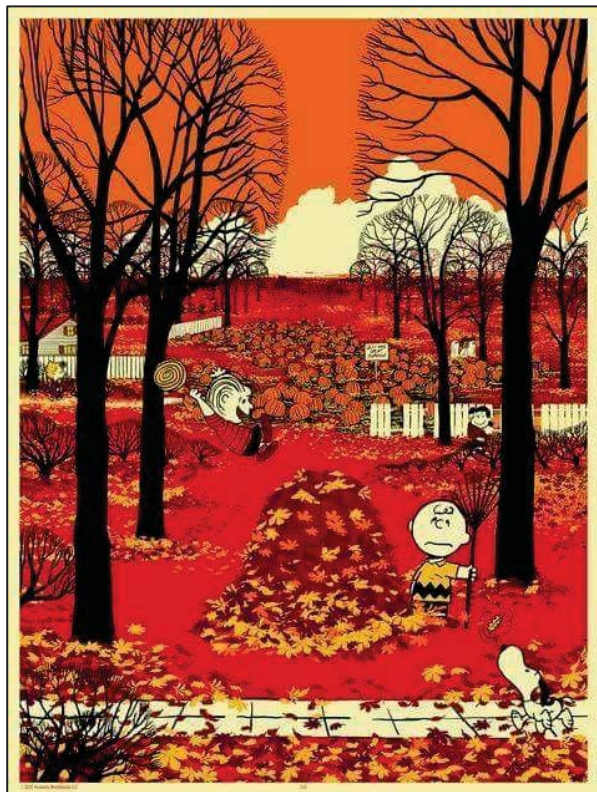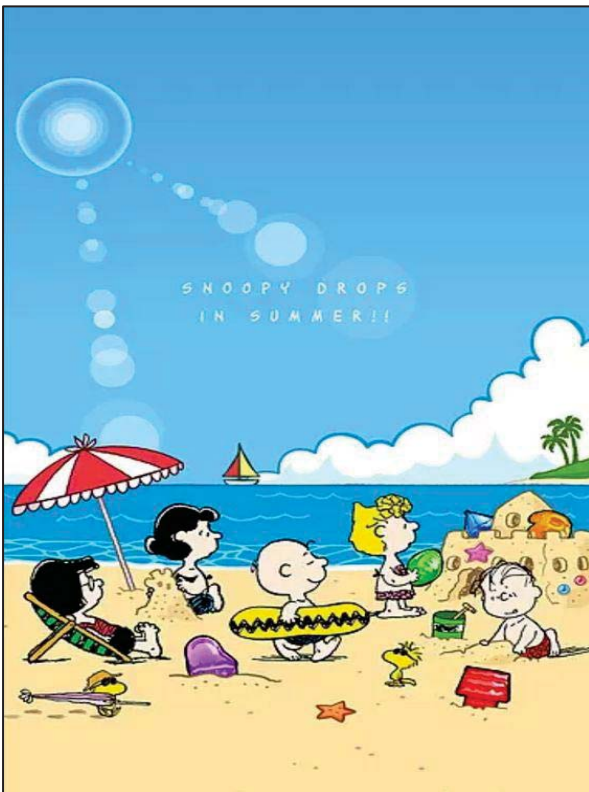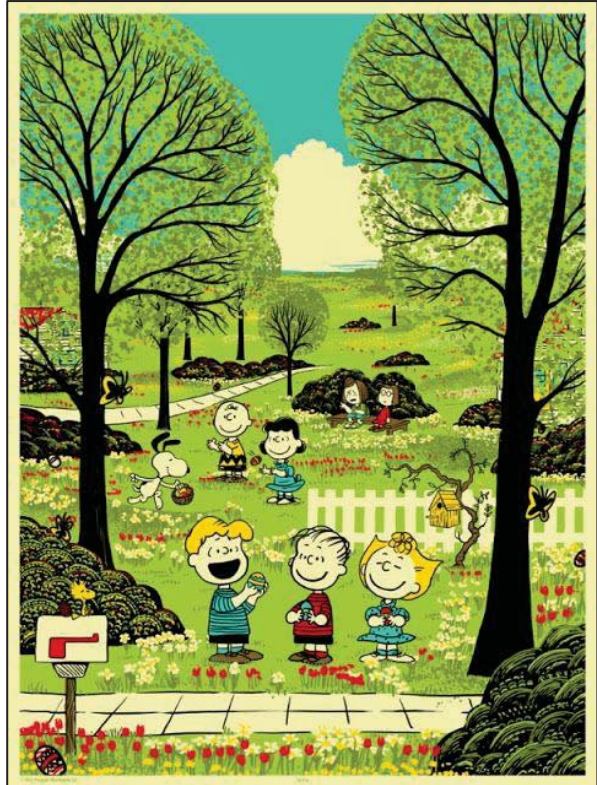
Figure 37. Images of cartoon characters wearing different clothes according to the season.

For example, the students can bring photos of themselves during their favourite season. The students need to compare the photos in groups, and discuss the following questions which the teacher will display on the interactive whiteboard and ask them verbally:

1) Which is the season when the weather is really hot in Malta?
2) What do we usually wear during this season?
3) During which season does it rain the most?
4) How do we adapt to rainfall?
5) How is Spring different from the other seasons?

Some potential responses from the students might include the following:

1) Summer is the hottest season because in this season the highest temperatures are recorded.
2) During Summer, we usually wear swimwear, shorts, tops, sandals, caps, hats and sunglasses.
3) It rains the most during Winter.
4) When it is raining, we wear raincoat and boots and sometimes we use an umbrella.
5) During Spring, the weather starts to get warmer and flowers start blooming.

Despite these potential students" responses, there might be other students" responses which are correct especially for open-ended questions like questions 4 and 5.

The students can answer these questions by comparing the lists which they would have created in groups and their photos. Then as a concluding activity, individually the students need to divide an A4 blank paper into four sections. In each section they will write the name of the seasons and then they need to draw something which they remember that is attributed to the particular season.

Apart from discussing how we adapt to the different seasons and weather conditions, the teacher can also help the students" develop their intercultural competence skills by showing different types of clothes worn by animated cartoon characters representing different cultures. Different characters" clothes can also be used to refer to particular time periods in history lessons. Furthermore, educators can develop the lesson on clothes, weather changes, and seasonality by linking it with issues of global warming and sustainability. In this way, educators will be making use of the cross-curricular theme of Education for Sustainable Development which is described in the NCF for all (Ministry for Education and Employment, 2012).

Although it may be a challenge for educators to teach critical thinking to their students in topics such as sustainability, they can facilitate such learning by using children"s parasocial relationships (Jennings & Alper, 2016) and wishful identification (Hoffner, 1996) with animated cartoon characters. Through these children"s feelings, which were also described by the students in this study and discussed in sub-sections 4.4.3 and 4.4.4, the students can recognise what emotion the animated character is feeling in a way that they empathise with the characters (Wilson, 2008; Paiva et al., 2005). This makes issues of sustainability easier to understand for students.

How do we keep fit and healthy: Learning Outcome 5

(http://www.schoolslearningoutcomes.edu.mt/en/subjects/science)

Learning outcomes: Till the end of this lesson, the students will be able to:

1.   Identify the impact of plastics and waste on nature

2.   Discuss potential solutions to these issues

For example, as an introductory activity, educators may wish to show the official trailer of Finding Dory available on the following link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0tkLUap7oGQ. After showing the trailer to the children, the teacher can ask the students to identify aspects in the video which show waste disposed at sea or harm caused to sea life. The following screenshots (Figures 38, 39, and 40) from Finding Dory show; glass bottles disposed of at sea, a bird with a popcorn cup in its head and pigeons eating popcorn disposed of on the floor, and Dory caught in plastic rings.

Figure 38. Screenshot 1 from *Finding Dory.* (Stanton & MacLane, 2016).

Figure 39. Screenshot 2 from *Finding Dory*. (Stanton & MacLane, 2016).

Figure 40. Screenshot 3. *Finding Dory*. (Stanton & MacLane, 2016).

The children can spot and identify the impact of using plastics and disposing of waste at sea. Then the teacher can give flashcards of these screenshots to the students and in groups of around four, the students need to discuss and come up with solutions for each case on how we can reduce, reuse or recycle the waste.

Following this discussion activity, as part of the lesson closure, the children will then represent their solutions which they would have discussed with each other. For homework, the students can be given the task of creating a poster with the aim of promoting awareness about the improper disposal of plastics and waste. This would help the students to demonstrate their creative skills as well as to consolidate their learning.

5.1.5 Teaching Arts and Crafts

Art in context: Learning Outcome 5
(http://www.schoolslearningoutcomes.edu.mt/en/subjects/art)

Learning outcomes: Till the end of this lesson, the students will be able to:

1.   Create a mosaic or a model out of recyclable materials

2.   Create awareness on plastics and recyclable waste disposal

An Arts and Crafts lesson following the lesson in sub-section 5.1.3, can be done by collecting plastic items as those observed in the video, like plastic rings, plastic or polystyrene cups and create models through crafts. The students can choose either to create a mosaic out of plastic bottle caps, as shown in Figure 41, or else to make a 3D character such as those represented in Figure 42, which could resemble an animated cartoon character. The image in Figure 41 was retrieved from: http://blukatkraft.blogspot.com/2011/12/how-to-make-upcycled-plastic-bottle-cap.html, whilst the image in Figure 42 was retrieved from: Image retrieved from: https://craftprojectideas.com/recycled-monsters/.

In order for the students to create the mosaic as in Figure 41, they need to glue the plastic bottle caps on an A3 cardboard. However, if the students choose to create character models as represented in Figure 42, they need to assemble and glue the materials together in order to make the different characters" body parts.

Figure 41. An example of a mosaic made out of plastic bottle caps.

Figure 42. An example of character models created from recycled materials.

The simplicity of this activity and the opportunity for choice makes it easier for students who may find it difficult to express themselves through drawing, as discussed in sub-section 4.2.1.

Furthermore, this activity is suitable for students with different drawing abilities and creative skills as described by Coates and Coates (2006), and provides the students with an opportunity to express what they know as suggested by Cox (1997). The models which the students create in this lesson could be exhibited in the classroom or in the school corridor so that it would help in creating awareness amongst the students in the school on ways of how we can reuse and recycle items to prevent harm to underwater life. Exhibiting the students" creative work can foster their control, agency and ownership as is indicated in Craft, Cremin, Hay, and Clack (2014).

5.1.6 Teaching Ethics, Personal, Social and Career Development, Religious and Moral Development and Social Studies.

Fostering a positive sense of ourselves: Learning Outcome 2 and 7
(http://www.schoolslearningoutcomes.edu.mt/en/subjects/ethics)
Citizenship: Learning Outcome 25
(http://www.schoolslearningoutcomes.edu.mt/en/subjects/personal-social-and-career-development)

Learning outcomes: Till the end of this lesson, the students will be able to:

1.   Nurture a positive sense of connectedness with the natural environment

2.   Discuss the morality of how we should treat animals

The students" interpretations discussed in sub-section 4.2.3 suggested that the children were able to recognise and distinguish between the animated cartoon characters" prosocial behaviour and violence or aggression. Moreover, as discussed in Section 4.3, the students in this study interpreted their views on social reality as influenced by animated cartoons.

Therefore, educators can make use of such animated cartoon character"s actions to teach subjects such as Ethics, Personal, Social and Career Development, Religious and Moral Development, and Social Studies. For example, educators can introduce a lesson on our connectedness with the natural environment and the way we should treat pets by showing the video „Scooby Snacks" which can be found on the following link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S2pLsYr8YgE. Two scenes from this video, represented in Figure 43, show Scooby Doo being dragged against his will by his owner (left) and Scooby Doo being overfed with treats (right).

Figure 43. Scenes from the video Scooby Snacks.

After the children watch the video, the teacher can present and ask the following questions to the students about how Scooby Doo was treated as a pet:

1) What did Scooby Doo"s owner do when Scooby Doo did not want to walk?
2) How do you think Scooby Doo felt?
3) What did the girl give to Scooby Doo?
4) Do you think she gave him a little or a lot?
5) If it was your pet what would you do?

Although there are different possible responses which the students can provide to these questions, possible answers might include:

1) When Scooby Doo did not want to walk, his owner dragged him against his will.

2) Scooby Doo might have felt hurt being dragged against his will.

3) The girl gave treats to Scooby Doo.

4) The girl gave a lot of treats to Scooby Doo directly from the box.

5) I would give it less treats because a lot of treats are not good for its health.

This activity can take the form of a discussion in groups. Each group can discuss and address a particular question and then share the outcomes of the discussion with the rest of the groups. Following the discussion, the teacher can also provide different flashcards, as represented in Figure 44, which show animated cartoon animals, animals in paintings, and real animals being treated differently.

As part of group work, the students need to discuss whether the flashcards show care, affection or neglect towards the animal, and list ways of how we should treat and care for animals. In order to help the students, the teacher can tell them to imagine that they are the person in the flashcard and they need to think what the person is saying to the animal. Thus, the students would be exploiting the mode of *speech* (Kress, 2010) to add meaning to the representation in the flashcard and to determine whether care or aggression on animals is being portrayed. In this way, as Lenters (2018) suggests, children learn how complex meanings can be conveyed through the various modes (Kress, 2010), as they interpret the meanings conveyed through the flashcards.
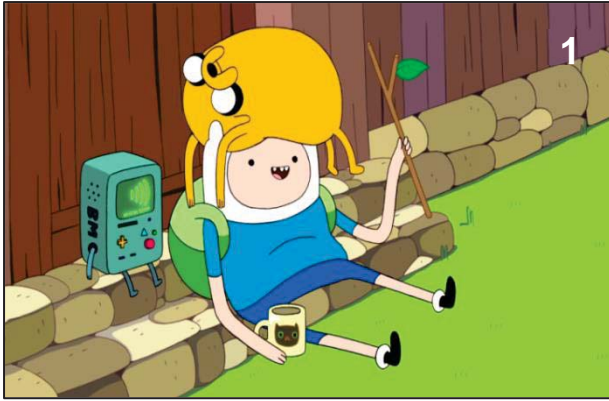
Figure 44. Flashcards showing animated cartoon animals, animals in paintings, and real animals being treated differently. Flashcards have been numbered for identification and referral purposes.

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The images in Figure 44 have been retrieved as follows:

1) https://www.google.com/search?q=jake+and+finn+playing&rlz=1C1GCEA_en MT799MT799&source=lnms&tbm=isch&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwiM9KuVtZDgAh XIyKQKHQtZBygQ_AUIDigB&biw=1366&bih=626#imgrc=KrCTjwx9_-tLqM:
2) https://videohive.net/item/side-view-of-pretty-girl-walking-purebred-dog-in-city-park-enjoying-nature-and-looking-around/22207056
3) https://wallpapersafari.com/w/oJPmRr
4) https://www.pinterest.com/pin/64387469646649264/
5) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jwcy0IFeh_4

Following this activity, as part of the closure of the lesson, each group of children can then present one of the flashcards to the other groups and discuss how we should treat animals. Since the students would be using these resources to analyse, criticise and interpret the "practices governing the social fields of everyday life" as stated in Luke (2012, p. 5), in this way, students would be developing their critical literacy (Ajayi, 2011).

5.2 Using Animated Cartoon Characters at Home

Apart from learning through formal education at school, as indicated in Section 2.7, children can also learn informally at home. For this reason, Eshach (2007) states that educators have sought ways of establishing stronger relationships between school and home. In Section 5.1 I have suggested ways of how educators can provide homework activities involving animated cartoon characters. However, through the following suggestions I will be indicating examples of simple activities which students can carry out with their parents or guardians to learn from animated cartoons at home.

5.2.1 Using Cartoon Watching for Learning at Home

Students can learn from digital texts because as indicated in sub-section 4.5.4 a student provided her interpretation of how she learnt from watching animated cartoons. However, as discussed in sub-section 2.3.3 and as indicated in the Data Analysis chapter, parents and guardians also have an important role in influencing what their children learn from animated cartoons.

At least, parents, grandparents or guardians need to dedicate time to monitor the content of the animated cartoons that the children are watching as suggested by Habib and Soliman (2015). However, following a cartoon watching activity, the parents or guardians can also discuss the content with their children, for example by asking the following questions:

1) Which part of the episode did you enjoy most?
2) Could this have happened in reality?
3) If you were that particular character, what would you do in that situation?
4) How could have the episode ended in a different way?
5) What do you think will happen in the next episode?
6) What did you learn from this episode?

As teachers, we can help parents or other adults responsible for children by informing them about positive and negative influences associated with animated cartoons through discussion. Teachers can also design activities similar to this and inform parents and guardians about ways of how the educational values of cartoons can be enhanced and how children can learn from cartoons. This can be done through talks, seminars, presentations, as well as through meetings.

Furthermore, the teacher can provide a list of similar questions to the students especially in cases when the parents are not with their children, as indicated by Habib and Soliman (2015). The students can use these questions by keeping a reflective journal or diary in which they write, draw or express what they think about the particular episode which they would have watched. In fact, the episode can be from any other print-based or digital texts which are intended for the children‟s age. The children can then show what they would have written or drawn on the diary to their parents, guardians, or teacher. Alternatively, the students can give their interpretation of the episode through drawing in the form of a comic. Such activities would still develop the children‟s critical literacy (Luke, 2012) as they would be reflecting and providing their interpretation of these digital texts. The children can also decorate their reflective diary which helps them develop their creativity skills.

Through these activities involving discussion, writing or drawing, the parents and guardians can strengthen the moral messages which the children watch through these digital texts as indicated by de Leeuw & van der Laan (2018). They can also utilise the educational potential of these digital texts as indicated by Andrienko and Kulikovskaya (2017, p. 42) to help their children "decode the deeper meaning of values hidden in them". Furthermore, through these activities, parents and guardians can help their children understand social reality better and to compare and contrast it with what they watch in animated cartoons as discussed in sub-section 4.3. This would help students to observe differences between reality and what they watch on these digital texts as indicated by Nwabueze and Okonkwo (2015).

5.2.2 Using Cartoon Character Merchandise

Parents and guardians buy animated cartoon character merchandise for their children as discussed by Dickie and Shucker (2014), and sometimes this can lead to addiction as highlighted Nwabueze and Okonkwo (2015) and as suggested in sub-section 4.5.1. However, animated cartoon character merchandise can also be used for educational purposes, such as imaginative play (Singer & Singer, 2005-2006) or to create an animation video. An example of how this can be done is shown on the video available through the following link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J3pzivXGMfI. As shown in a scene from this video in Figure 45 (Time of Screenshot: 00:04; Link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J3pzivXGMfI), students can use such characters to create narrative which are alternative to the stories that they would have watched in the animated cartoons.

Figure 45. Children using cartoon characters' and other characters' merchandise to create a stop-motion animation video.

The children need to set up the characters or figures, take a picture with a still camera, move the characters or figures slightly and take another picture. This process is known as stop-motion animation (Parry, 2010) because it makes use of the animation technique, described in Section 2.1 to create the impression that the characters or figures are moving.

However, due to the concept known as the digital divide (Van Dijk, 2017), not every student might have access to such information and communication technology. In fact, students who do not have access to camera for producing stop-motion animation, can be provided with an opportunity to produce drawings of their cartoon character merchandise, design new cartoon characters or participate in story-telling activities with their cartoon character merchandise.

According to Veresov and Kulikovskaya (2015) and Andrienko and Kulikovskaya (2017), images of imagination such as those included in these activities, like the children‟s animation video, enrich the children‟s experience and help them in their development of their creativity. Furthermore, since in these activities, children make use of different modes, including, *image*, *speech*, and *gesture*, they help students understand how complex meanings can be conveyed through the interplay of these channels of communication (Lenters, 2018).

5.2.3 Controlling Addiction to Animated Cartoons

The data analysis in this study, particularly Sabrina‟s interpretation in sub-section 4.5.1, agrees with Nwabueze and Okonkwo (2015) that children may become addicted to animated cartoon watching.

In order to help children overcome their cartoon watching addiction, educators need to work with parents or guardians who can monitor their children"s cartoon watching at home. Educators can work with parents or guardians to design time tables which lessen the amount of cartoons watching time for children who are addicted to cartoons. For example, if these children watch around 2 hours of cartoons daily, the time table represented in Table 11 may help these children control their cartoon watching addiction. It should be noted that cartoon watching time also depends on the length of each cartoon episode.

Day	Cartoon Watching Time (in minutes)
Monday	45
Tuesday	30
Wednesday	45
Thursday	45
Friday	60
Saturday	90
Sunday	45

Table 11. An example of a cartoon watching time table which may help children who watch cartoons for around 2 hours daily to control their cartoon watching addiction.

The values presented in Table 11 are based on the result that children watch on average more than an hour of cartoons daily as discussed in sub-section 4.1.1 and as obtained by Li et al. (2015) and İvrendi and Özdemir (2010). Moreover, higher cartoon watching time was allocated on weekends due to the abundance of cartoons aired on Saturdays as indicated by Lustyik (2010).

Even though the time table in Table 11 may help children addicted to cartoons to control their addiction, I suggest that parents or guardians still make use of the activities described in sub-sections 5.2.1 and 5.2.2. This is because, apart from helping their children to control their addiction, the parents will be helping their children develop their creativity skills as well as strengthening the moral messages which the cartoons convey, as indicated in de Leeuw and van der Laan (2018). In order to make parents aware about this, as an educator I intend to inform parents or guardians through discussions and talks.

Other influences of animated cartoon characters on children may represent challenges which are way beyond the educators" and parents" or guardians" ability to handle alone. These influences may include psychological, health, or emotional disturbances which might occur either because of the nature of the cartoon which may not be age-appropriate, aggressive or violent, or because of the child"s age and psychological characteristics (Wiedeman et al., 2015). If such challenges arise, special educational support may be required. Therefore, as indicated in Section 3.6, in such cases it is advisable that educators consult with other professionals, such as members of support groups or psycho-social teams within their school to discuss potentially effective ways of how to deal with these challenges. Furthermore, it is important that in such cases the specialised educational ways devised to help the child are provided in such a way that promotes the child"s educational growth whilst safeguarding the child"s well-being.

5.3 Conclusion

These are some pedagogical suggestions which may help educators to motivate and engage their students by developing lessons related to the children‟s interests. Parents and guardians can also benefit from these suggestions by carrying out the activities described with their children in order to consolidate their children‟s learning from cartoons. I hope that educators and adults responsible for children make use of these suggestions to provide primary children with an enjoyable learning experience as part of their holistic education. Since different students have different interests, experiences and relationships with cartoon characters, some of these activities might need to be adapted accordingly. Therefore, I encourage educators to use their creativity to develop lessons including cartoon characters based on their students‟ interests and experiences, to enhance the students learning experience and to help them reach their potential for their academic success.

Chapter 6 – Conclusion

6.1 A General View of the Outcomes of this Research

In this study, I investigated how primary children understand and relate with cartoon characters. This investigation helped me answer the two research questions of this study.

The first research question which I answered in this study was:

1. How do primary children understand and relate to cartoon characters?

The answer to this question was provided by the primary children themselves, who participated in this study by sharing with me their understanding and relationship with the cartoon characters which they chose. Comparison of the children"s descriptions and expressions through the analysis revealed that the children understood cartoon characters in terms of their appearance and portrayal; attitudes and behaviour; nature and character; features and attributes; living environments; and social relationships. The children"s understanding of the cartoon characters which they described influenced the way that they related with the cartoon characters. In agreement with Jennings and Alper (2016), this study suggests that children are able to form both positive and negative parasocial relationships with cartoon characters. Furthermore, the results in this study indicate that a child"s negative parasocial relationship with a cartoon character hinders his/ her understanding about it, whereas a positive parasocial relationship enhances the child"s understanding of the cartoon character.

The second research question which I answered in this study was:

2. What teaching implications can primary school educators draw from children"s understanding of animated cartoons to create effective learning?

The children"s expressions about their understanding and relationships with cartoon characters in this study, demonstrate the important role that cartoon characters have in their lives. Consequently, based on the children"s interpretations, I provided suggestions how these cartoon characters and others can be used to enhance the learners" educational experience. The suggestions which I provided include activities and resources which can be adapted by primary educators according to their students" interests, understanding and relationship with similar characters. I also discussed the educational relevance of each activity, provided examples of how these can be implemented, and discussed potential ways of how educators, parents and guardians can deal with challenges related with the use of animated cartoon characters. In this way, I demonstrated potential ways of how educators, parents and guardians can use their imagination and creativity to develop activities which enhance primary children"s critical thinking and holistic education.

6.2 Limitations of the Research

Since the actual study was carried out during school hours, the time that could be afforded for carrying out the activities with the students individually was only limited to one hour. If more time were available, the students could have spent more time on their drawing.

The students could have also watched a cartoon video for longer than five minutes and elaborated their interpretation of the video further if more time was available.

Another limitation of this research was that I did not implement the suggestions which I derived from the children‟s understanding and relationship with cartoon characters. Therefore, these suggestions can form the basis of future work by being adapted and/ or implemented with primary children according to the year group.

6.3 Suggestions for Future Research

Future research related to this study can include an analysis of educators‟ effective use of cartoon characters in lessons with primary children. Such research may be based on a qualitative research methodology which includes observation and analysis of the effectiveness of different activities like those suggested above in helping primary children engage in lessons and reach desired learning objectives. Future work can also build on the resources and activities suggested in this study to design and develop interdisciplinary teaching resources related with cartoon characters for primary students.

Another research, similar to this study, which can be carried out includes an analysis of how cartoon characters‟ characteristics like portrayal and attitudes have changed over the years and how this influences primary children‟s understanding and relationship with cartoon characters. This can be carried out by providing primary children with the opportunity to choose classic and modern cartoons and watch them together with the researcher.

Then the researcher can conduct informal interviews or administer questionnaires to the children from which a comparison can be made between the children‟s understanding and relationship of classic and modern cartoon characters. This could help in developing a clearer understanding of the cartoon characters‟ characteristics which the children like. This would also help in predicting which cartoon characters might be future favourites amongst primary children.

Further suggestions for future research include how teacher education can help create awareness about the influences of cartoons on children and how cartoons can be used in education. Teachers‟ perceptions on the use of cartoons in education can also form the basis of future research, as well as potential ways of how educators can work with parents on this matter. Moreover, future work can also include more suggestions on how cartoons can be integrated into specific curricular subjects or how activities including cartoon characters, can be adapted for more culturally diverse classrooms.

6.4 Concluding Remarks

As educators, we gain experience and develop professionally as we interact with children. As learners we learn from these interactions with children about their lived realities, their interests and their experiences. The experiences and lived realities which the children shared with me in this study indicate how much cartoon characters mean to them and the important role that these characters have in their lives.

This has strengthened my belief that as educators we need to immerse ourselves in children‟s culture and critically consider potential ways of how we can develop lessons and activities which are both interesting and engaging for primary students. I demonstrated that this is possible by listening to the students‟ expressions about their understanding and relationships with cartoon characters which inspired me to develop activities based on their interests. Therefore, I hope that this study serves as an inspiration for educators to utilise their imagination and creativity to integrate cartoon characters in their teaching. I believe that through authentic discussions with their students, primary educators can find novel ways how to critically use cartoon characters to provide primary children with an enhanced educational experience.

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Appendix A

Children's Questionnaire

& Informal Interview Questions

Children's Questionnaire

Name:_____

Year:__

1) <u>Do you watch cartoons? (Mark with a ✓)</u>

Yes ☐   No ☐   I don"t know ☐

2) <u>Do you like cartoons? (Mark with a ✓)</u>

Yes ☐   No ☐   I don"t know ☐

3) <u>Please explain why.</u>

_____

_____

_____

4) <u>How much time do you spend watching cartoons during the week (from Monday to Sunday)? (Mark with a ✓)</u>

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
less than 1 hour							
1 hour or more							
2 hours or more							

5) <u>If you watch cartoons, please write some of their names below:</u>

_____

_____

6) <u>Would you like to participate in activities related to cartoons? (Mark with a ✓)</u>

Yes ☐   No ☐   I don"t know ☐

Thank you for your participation ☺

Informal Interview Questions

1) What can you tell me about this drawing?

2) Why did you choose to draw this cartoon character?

3) What is the name of this cartoon character?

*If children find it difficult to express themselves ask questions Nr. 5 and Nr. 6.

4) If you were to talk to the character you drew, what would you tell him/her?

5) Tell me something about your drawing. (Note for researcher: Ask on the character/s and different aspects of the drawing).

6) What do you like about this cartoon character?

7) Why did you choose these colour/s for your drawing?

8) Why did you draw the character small/ large, facing here/ there?

9) Why did you choose to draw this background behind the character?

10) Why did you draw the cartoon character on this side of the paper?

11) Ask about any words that the children have written or why they did not write any words.

12) How did you feel more comfortable expressing yourself through: drawings, writing or describing the cartoon character?

Appendix B

Head of School Permission letter

Teacher's Information Letter

Parents' Information Letter

Parents' Consent Form

Children's Recruitment Letter

Children's Assent Form

Head of School Permission Letter

Dear Mr/ Mrs _____,

I, Robert Attard am reading for an M.T.L. degree at the University of Malta. As part of my dissertation, I would like to study how primary children understand and relate with cartoon characters under the supervision of Dr George Cremona.

I would like to kindly ask for your permission to work with a class of around 20, Year 5 students at your school. The students will be invited to participate in activities in which they will represent and describe cartoon characters. These activities will involve the children making drawings of cartoon characters, describing these characters in writing and verbally through a short, audio-recorded informal interview.

Both students" parental consent and the students" assent are needed for the students to participate in these activities. After having obtained the parents" consent, I would like to verbally explain to the students what the project and activities entail and provide them with a recruitment letter. Once the students are informed about the project and activities in which they will be involved, I will give them an assent form so that they can provide their assent.

The activities will be divided into 3 sessions. In one of the sessions which will take around 45 minutes, the children will participate in the drawing and writing activities. After the first session, 8 participants will be selected by purposive sampling depending on which cartoon characters they would have chosen to draw. In the other 2 sessions, the chosen 8 participants will participate in 5-10 minutes one-to-one audio-recorded interviews. The date and time when these activities will take place is at your discretion. If possible, I would suggest that these activities will take place during an art lesson so that the children who do not wish to take part in this project or who have not given their assent can participate in a related academic lesson with their teacher.

Furthermore, the participating students can stop doing the activities at any time even if their full assent has been given. Also, should the children wish to stop the audio-recorder, they can do so at any time during the interview. All data gathered from these activities and the school will be kept confidential and anonymity is guaranteed.

Thanks for your time and consideration and should you have any query please do not hesitate to contact me.

Best regards,

Mr Robert Attard
Phone number: ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮
E-mail address: ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮
Supervisor"s e-mail address: ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮

_____   _____
Researcher"s signature   Supervisor"s signature

Teacher"s information letter

Dear Mr/ Mrs _____,

I, Robert Attard, am grateful that I have the opportunity to work with your students. As the headmaster may have already informed you, I intend to study primary children"s understanding and relationship with cartoon characters. I intend to do this through activities in which the children will draw and describe cartoon characters in writing and through a short informal interview. The activities will be divided into at least 3 sessions. In one of the sessions which will take around 45 minutes, the children will participate in the drawing and writing activities. After the first session, 8 participants will be selected by purposive sampling based on their drawings and writings of cartoon characters. In the other 2 sessions, the chosen 8 participants will participate in 5-10 minutes, one-to-one audio-recorded interviews. Please note that it is at the headmaster"s discretion to choose an appropriate date and time when the activities will take place.

As only the students who give their full assent and those who are chosen based on their drawings can participate, I appreciate if you take care of the rest of the students who can continue doing other related academic activities.

Thanks in advance for your co-operation and do not hesitate to contact me should you feel the need.

Best regards,
Robert Attard

_____   _____
Supervisor"s signature   Researcher"s signature
E-mail: ██████████████████   Email: ██████████████████
                                                    Mobile number: ████████

<u>Parents/Guardians" Information Letter</u>

Dear Parents/Guardians,

I, Robert Attard, am studying at the University of Malta to become a teacher. As part of my dissertation, I would like to study primary children"s understanding and relationship with cartoon characters under the supervision of Dr George Cremona.

In order to conduct this study, I would like to kindly request your permission to work with your child by means of activities in which the children have fun representing and describing cartoon characters as part of a lesson. For your child to participate in these activities both your consent and the children"s assent are required. These activities will involve the children making drawings of cartoon characters, describing these characters in writing and verbally through a short, audio-recorded informal interview. From these drawings and writings, eight will be selected for the purpose of this study based on the cartoon characters which the children draw. Only the eight students whose drawings and writings are selected will be interviewed.

Please note that participation in these activities is completely voluntary and the children can stop doing the activities at any time should they wish so. Please also note that any data collected during these activities including the drawings, writings and voice-recordings will be kept confidential and anonymous.

If you would like to grant permission to your child to participate in these activities kindly fill in and sign the consent form attached. Thanks for your time and consideration and should you have any query please do not hesitate to contact me or my supervisor.

Yours truly,

Mr Robert Attard.

Phone: ███████

E-mail: ██████████████████

Supervisor"s e-mail: ████████████████

_____   _____

Supervisor"s signature   Researcher"s signature

Parents/Guardians" Consent Form

I, the undersigned, parent/ guardian of _____ (*child"s name*), have understood what the research project and activities entail and the information letter.

I grant permission and give my consent to: (Please mark with a ✓)

- ○ my child to take part in the drawing and writing activities.
- ○ my child to take part in the audio-recorded interview.
- ○ the researcher to use my child"s drawing, writing and interview recording for the purpose of this study.

Parent"s/ Guardian"s name:_____

Parent"s/ Guardian"s signature: _____

Date:_____

Thanks for your co-operation. Should you have any query please contact me or my supervisor.

Researcher"s name: Robert Attard_____

Researcher"s signature: _____

Mobile number: ███████

E-mail: ██████████████████

Supervisor"s name: Dr George Cremona

Supervisor"s signature: _____

E-mail: ██████████████████

Recruitment letter for children

Dear Student,

I, Robert Attard, am a University of Malta student studying to become a teacher. I am working on a project which seeks to find out how primary children like you understand and relate to cartoon characters.

Your parents have given me permission to work with you, however, it is up to you to decide if you want to participate or not. If you choose to participate in this project, you will be drawing cartoon characters and describing these characters in writing. You may also be talking about cartoon characters with me through a short audio-recorded interview. From these drawings and writings, eight will be selected for the purpose of this study based on the cartoon characters which you choose to draw. The drawings and writings will not be chosen based on your drawing ability or how nice the drawing is. Only the eight students whose drawings and writings are selected will be interviewed.

You can ask questions at any time during these activities and if you change your mind and wish to stop, you can do so at any time you want during the activities. If you decide to participate, the things you say and draw and any information written about you will not have your name on it, so no one will know they are yours.

If you would like to participate please fill in and sign the assent form provided. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me. Thanks for your time and consideration.

Best regards,

Robert Attard

Researcher''s signature: _____

Mobile number: ███████

E-mail: ███████████████

Supervisor''s signature: _____

Supervisor''s e-mail: ██████████████████

Children"s Assent Form

I have read and understood the information letter and what this project and activities involve. I agree to participate by (Please mark with a ✓):

- ○ Taking part in the drawing and writing activities.

- ○ Taking part in the audio-recorded interview.

- ○ Allowing the researcher to use my drawings, writings and audio-recorded interview.

Child"s name: _____

Child"s signature: _____

Date: _____

Signature of the researcher:_____

Mobile number: ███████

E-mail: ████████████████████

Signature of supervisor: _____

E-mail: ████████████████████

Appendix C

Example of Interview Transcript

Original Children's Quotes in Maltese (prior to translation)

Example of Interview Transcript (translated)

R: So… what did you draw here?

S: I drew Mickey Mouse… raising his hands… and he"s happy.

R: And why is he raising his hand and happy?

S: ((*smiling*)) Because it"s like telling you Hello.

R: I see, so he"s like talking to us…

S: Mhm, mhm.

R: And… why, did you choose to draw Mickey Mouse.

S: ((*smiling*)) Because coincidently, yesterday we watched… Mickey Mouse… and I love Mickey Mouse.

R: Em… if you were… to talk with Mickey Mouse… what would you say to him, if you were to see him?

S: I would tell him… tell him that I love watching your cartoons… and… that… I, what is it called?... I watch him whenever I can.

R: The cartoons…?

S: Mhm, the cartoons.

R: All right, em… and… what do you like most about this character?

S: That he never fights with his friends… and… that he does things which I cannot do, so… like, like… instead of me doing them (the), he does them… and… he shows them in cartoons.

R: And what are these things like, can you give me some examples…?

S: He drives in a submarine… goes… goes on… (what does he say)… goes on a tractor… races…

R: Are these races, car races?

S: Mhm.

R: All right, em… Now, I would like to turn to the drawing…You chose to draw for example, the dungaree [you told me] right, in red… and the character in black, can you tell me why you chose these colours, you used?

S: [Mhm] Because Mickey Mouse"s dungaree… is red, and because he is a mouse… he"s black.

R: And for instance his eyes, why did you draw them in blue?

S: Because if I"m not mistaken, they are blue on television.

R: And why are the buttons yellow?

S: Because on television, the buttons are yellow.

R: Okay I understand… em… yes, as a character you drew it… in the centre [of the paper] [right]?… and… you drew it… occupying a large part of the paper right [.]? Why did you draw it… like this?

S: [Mhm] [Mhm] [Mhm] Because… Because I didn"t have… because I didn"t want to include writing, draw the… the… his friends. And that"s why I drew it large, so that it is more conspicuous.

R: I understand.

S: Sort of because I can draw it better like this, not small.

R: I understand, I understand. Em… and you drew it looking at us?

S: Mhm.

R: Why?

S: Like because he is like waving at us because, that"s why I drew his hand… upwards.

R: Like he is [waving] [at us] right?… and he is looking at us.

S: [Mhm] [Mhm] Mhm.

R: I understand. Em… now, apart from Mickey Mouse on the, you drawing, you chose to omit the background…

S: Mhm.

R: Why did you choose to omit the background?

S: In reality, I was, I was going to… draw his fort sort of. But, then mm, what is it called? I drew him large… and I chose to omit it.

R: So Mickey Mouse has a fort?

S: Mhm

R: And… what does Mickey Mouse do in his fort?

S: Meets his friends, cooks, plays… and plays with, with his dog.

R: All right, and… why did you draw Mickey Mouse in the centre?

S: So that it is large.

R: So that you can [draw it] large on the paper…

S: [Mhm] Mhm.

R: And… you chose to omit any words…on the paper…

S: Mhm.

R:Yes, can you tell me why… why… you chose to omit any words?

S: Because then I was going to write on the…foolscap, that"s why.

R: I see, all right, you were going to write on the foolscap. And… how did you feel most comfortable… comfortable to express yourself, through drawing?, through writing?… or, like, talking with me, like we"re talking now?

S: Writing.

R: [You felt] almost comfortable writing, [okay]. Now in you writing… you told me that Mickey Mouse has a lot of animal friends… [.] Um, what are Mickey Mouse"s animal friends like?

S: [(the most)] [Mhm] [Mhm] Like a dog… a larger dog, then there is, there is a duck, another duck… and a mouse.

R: And do you know their name?

S: Mhm.

R: Can you tell me their names?

S: Mhm. The du, the du… the duck… Daisy… the other one… Donald… the larger dog Goofy… and … and the mouse Minnie.

R: I understand. And… you told me that Mickey Mouse is a good friend because he never fights with his friends [right]?

S: [Mhm]

R: Em… all right… I understand. Em… yes, then you told me your reason why you like Mickey Mouse [.]… why you chose it…and what was this reason?

S: [Mhm] Because I… like Mickey Mouse… and when I was younger, I used to watch it a lot. And what"s it called?... and now my sister, she still watches it and I watch it with her… and I like it.

R: And have you watched it recently… [.] between when you were younger, and… yesterday?

S: [Mhm] Mhm.

R: All right, thank you very much.

S: (Mhm)

Original Children's Quotes in Maltese (prior to translation)

*"Għax **Mickey Mouse id-dungaree tiegħu… aħmar, u hu la ġurdien… iswed**."*
(Sven)

*"**Ħalli, jekk ikun hemm xi nies… li jkunu rawh u ma għarfuhiex, jkunu jafu li, li minn… dak il-film tiġi**."* (Sarah)

*"Ee [((smiling)) **Il-qrun** tax-]xa… hawn, tal-, **ta' moħħhom** jew ((smiling)) x'inhu dan… **ileqq ukoll**."* (Sabrina)

*"U pereżempju, **ikollhom il-malji ma' xagħarhom…**"* (Sabrina)

*"**Din hi**"* (Sarah)

*"**Dan l-aktar li joġgħobni**."* (Sabrina)

*"Għax **ma tantx kont naf x'nista' nikteb fuqu għax ma tantx narah il-film**."*
(Stephanie)

*"**Ma tantx naf… inpenġi ħafna jiena**."* (Sabienne)

*"Em… għax pereżempju, **ma nafx… inpenġi s-siġar u l-ħaxix… ma nafx kif**."*
(Sabrina)

*"Għamiltha bil-lapes biss, għax jien ma tantx, naf eżatti l-kuluri… tagħhom ma nafx eżatti kif inhuma… **għax għandhom ħafna kuluri… sbieħ, imma ma nafx kif, (hekk), inpenġihom**.*" (Sabrina)

*"**Għax hekk hi, u… dawk il-kuluri sbieħ ħafna, jogħġbuni.**"* (Scarlett)

*"Għax tħobb tgħin… u… u, **ħelwa u sabiħa**.*" (Scarlett)

*"**Ma tantx kont naf x'background nista' nagħmel** u għamilt il-kelb taparsi ra għadma mal-art.*" (Stephanie)

*"**Jiltaqa' mal-ħbieb, isajjar, jilgħab… u jilgħab mal-, mal-kelb tiegħu.**"* (Sven)

*"Em… **insaqsiha, min huma l-ħbieb tagħha**…"* (Sarah)

*"Tgħin eżempju meta… ikun hemm xi ħadd… eżempju fuq siġra u ma jistax jinżel , tgħinu… u… u, tgħinu għax **il-ħabiba tagħha, kif għidtlek… qisha tiġi suldat, allura tkun tista' tgħina wkoll.**"* (Scarlett)

*"Pinġejt lil Scooby Doo, **il-kelb ta' raġel** u… għax aktar easy biex tpinġih għax kelb."* (Stephanie)

*"Għax **tobdi**…" "**Lil sidtha**"* (Scarlett)

*"**Dan li jagħmel il-butterflies poisonous.**"* (Samantha)

"Hawnhekk għamel butterfly poisonous u għamel lil Adrian." (Samantha)

"Irid jagħmilhom ħziena biex jaqbad il-powers u jsir famous." (Samantha)

"Ħa nsiblek biċċa kif isiru superheroes." (Samantha)

"Insaqsiha… (like) kieku, kellek tinbidel, f'xix tinbidel?" (Scarlett)

"L-ewwel tkun prinċipessa… mbagħad tista' tiġi… em… suldat qisha." (Scarlett)

"Isuq fis-submarine… ji… jitla' fuq… (x'jgħid)… jitla' fuq tractor… jagħmel ir-races…" (Sven)

"Eżempju, darba, qaltilha biex iġġib xi ħaġa, u tagħtilha." (Scarlett)

"Em… insaqsiha, min huma l-ħbieb tagħha…" (Sarah)

"Taparsi qed xxejjer" *"Mmm, lil ħbieb tagħha."* (Sarah)

"Għax huma hekk lebsin, ġieli jmorru l-iskola u jilbsu casual u meta jsiru superheroes jinbidlu hekk – kif pinġejthom" (Samantha)

"għax mhux hekk normali bħala cartoons. In-normali jkollhom xortz u top ġieli."
(Sven)

"għax hawn min jaqtalhom denbhom u jien inħobbhom twal denbhom mhux qosra. Huwa ħazin li jaqtawlhom denbhom u widnejhom għax il-klieb ma tantx jieħdu pjaċir… jibżgħu." (Stephanie)

"[Mhm] Għax jiena… jogħġobni Mickey Mouse… u meta kont żgħir, kont narah ħafna. U x'jgħidulu?... u issa oħti qed, tkompli tarah u jien noqgħod narah magħha… u jogħġobni." (Sven)

*"(Għax) Għax pereżempju, għax **meta tiġi għandi kuġinti, toqgħod tara l-cartoons, dejjem SpongeBob toqgħod tara** ((smiling)), **u jien vera… jdejjaqni."*
(Sabienne)*

"Għax l-aktar li jarawh il-boys." "Għax il-girls ma tantx jgħidu li jarawh."
(Stephanie)

"Għax qisu l-kelb tal-film jistgħu jitkellmu u jien ma nħobbx l-annimali jitkellmu." (Stephanie)

"Biex… jirranġhom ftit il-… cartoons, ħalli nkun nista' narahom iktar."
(Sabienne)

"Għamilthom iħarsu lejna biex in-nies iħarsu lejhom u ħalli n-nies jidħqu wkoll u ma jkunux imdejqin jew ma jagħtux kas." (Samantha)

*"Li qatt ma jiġġieled mal-ħbieb tiegħu… u… li **jagħmel affarijiet li ma nistax nagħmel jiena, allura… hekk, qisu… minflok qed nagħmilhom jiena (l-), jagħmilhom hu… u… ġabhom f'cartoons."* (Sven)

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"Ngħidilha li inti sabiħa…" "Biex nilgħabu flimkien… jew jekk (hux) tgħix id-dar tiegħi." (Sabrina)

"Meta bdejt naraħ lewwel darba qbat il-vizju u qbajt narah sal-lum." (faithfully reproduced from Sabrina"s writing)

*"Vizzju - **Qisni bdejt nara hafna affarijiet sbieħ u bqajt narah sal-lum"*** (Sabrina)

"Għandi ġugarell li huwa unicorn. Jisima Emma hila għan 7 giemat." (faithfully reproduced from Sabrina"s writing) *"**Il-mummy ratni npinġihom ħafna u xtratuli u ffissajt fuq il-unicorns"*** (field notes)

"Għax inħobb nara l-cartoons meta mmur għand in-nanna u narah mill-ewwel wara l-iskola, imbagħad nagħmel il-homework." (Sabrina)

*"Għax għandhom… id-di, haw, **id-dinja tagħhom sabiħa u mimlija ħelu.**"*(Sabrina)

*"Eħe, **nemmen li Bill Cipher real, għax rajt ħafna… ħafna nies li ħadu ritratti miegħu u tafgħuhom** fuqu. U… kif… bit-tpenġi, bit-tpinġija fil-hu sar… huwa statue, eżatti kif rawħ, kif rajtu fuq ir-ritratti li t-tfal ħadu**." "Fuq l-internet**, ktibt Bill Cipher real… u ġewni r-ritratti. **Iġifieri, dan vera.**"* (Selena)

*"U ma jistgħux ikellmuh hekk, imma jistgħu jerġgħu jamluh ħaj, imbagħad jitkellmu miegħu. **Ħaj, kif trid tagħmlu ħaj**, tista' tagħmel deal miegħu. U jekk, għax hu statue kif trid tagħmel deal miegħu… kemm taqbad idejh, u tgħidlu it's a deal… **daqshekk. U jerġa ħaj.**"* (Selena)

*"Mħm. Ċoff, **dan mhijux tifel… em… tifla, dan boy. Imma hu hekk** (għidtlek) **għax dan weird.**" "Iġifieri **għandu għajn waħda, triangle… iċ-ċoff, l-għajn, l-eyelashes**, [hekk]."* (Selena)

*"**It-tfal kellhom il-puppets u Bill Cipher kien gie ghat-tifel. Kien qed jaghmel il-password. Bill Cipher qallu li jista' jghidlu l-password imma ried itih puppet. "Hu kien qed jghid li l-puppet hija r-ruh t-tifel. Imbaghad ghamlu d-deal, nehha ruh it-tifel kollha u hu dahal gol-gisem imma t-tifel kien ghadu haj imma kien ghadu fatatin.**"* (Selena)

*"U jien ukoll **id-dream tiegħi hi li mmur l-Amerka u nfittxu u jkolli adventure**." "**Għax jekk nagħmel deal miegħu u tkun, em… ikolli adventure**." "**Adventure, daqskemm tkun dangerous ma jimpurtanix**." "Insomma, **nieħu pjaċir għax ikun vera dan, u jidħol f'moħħi u jara kollox**." "**Għax ikun daħal ġo moħħi, nkun naf li daħal ġo moħħi, u… hekk għax inħobbu ħafna., u rridu jidħol ġo moħħi**."* (Selena)

*"**Għax pereżempju, jekk ħabibtek tkun aħjar minn xi ħaġa li… tagħmlu t-tnejn… li intom… mhux għax hi tkun aħjar, ma tkunux ħbieb aktar**."* (Sarah)

Appendix D

List of cartoons watched by the 37 students who participated

in the questionnaire

List of reasons that the children provided for liking or not

liking cartoons

Miraculous	SpongeBob	Tom and Jerry
Scooby Doo	Teen Titans Go	The Amazing World of Gumball
Mr Bean	Ruby and Max	Vampirina
Monster High	Adventure Time	Dora the explorer
Peppa Pig	Bugs Bunny	Shimer and shine
Nella the princess knight	Gravity Falls	Pokemon
Paw Patrol	Fairly Odd Parents	The Thundermans
Super Mario	The tiny bunch	Wally Kazam
Finding Nemo	Finding Dory	Steven Universe
Oggy and the cockroaches	Pencilmation	LazyTown
PJ Mask	Puppy dog pals	Uncle Grandpa
Five Nights at Freddy's	Skylanders	Horrid Henry
Diary of a wimpy kid	Sofia the first	Elena of Avelor
Sunny day	K.C Undercover	Clarence
Dragon ball	Pink Panther	Ben 10
Angry Birds	Chaves	Equistria girls
My Little Pony	We Bare Bears	

Cartoons watched by the 37 students who participated in the questionnaire

I enter another world	Make me happy	Adventures	Funny
I love the characters	Fantasy	Cool	Fighting
Bring me memories	I learn	Mystery	Interesting
I like watching cartoons	Nice	Good	For children
They make me sleep	Colourful	Hilarious	Incredible
I like watching TV	Musical	Original	Magic
Everybody can watch them	Popular	Cute	I do not watch TV

Children's reasons for liking or not liking cartoons.

Glossary of Terms

Altruism: the voluntary act of helping someone or sharing something intentionally with the purpose to benefit others beyond simple sociability or duties associated with role (Smith et al., 2006).

Animated cartoons: cartoons in which cartoon characters are given life through the process of animation (Dobson, 2009).

Animated films: "…ones in which individual drawings, paintings or illustrations are photographed frame by frame (stop-frame cinematography). Usually, each frame differs slightly from the one preceding it, giving the illusion of movement when frames are projected in rapid succession at 24 frames per second." (Dirks, 2019)

Animation: A process and an art form which is not a "live action film", in which motion is simulated and inanimate objects and characters brought to life. (Dobson, 2009)

Cartoon: *"The term cartoon has become a ubiquitous name for anything animated but its origins come from print media and earlier types of illustration."* *(Dobson, 2009, p. 35).*
Cartoons are works of art which translate humour into drawings, illustrations or animated films by giving colour, form and character to the most varied and imaginative sense of fable or reality itself. (Jensen, 1997)

Cartoon characters: "At one and the same time, such characters can be beasts and humans, or neither; can prompt issues about gender, race and ethnicity, generation, and identity, or not; and can operate innocently or submersively, or as something else entirely." Wells (2008) p. 3

Colour: a mode which consists of a set of elements and features, or semiotic resources, including hue, saturation, differentiation, modulation or purity. (MODE, 2012)

Concurrent nested model: A mixed method approach by which qualitative and quantitative data are collected simultaneously and which gives a priority to one of the methods (qualitative or quantitative) whilst the other method is embedded in the predominant method (Creswell, 2003).

Convenience sampling: a nonprobability sampling technique used by researchers when the target population meets certain practical criteria such as; easy accessibility, availability at a given time, or the willingness to participate (Etikan, Musa, & Alkassim, 2016).

Critical literacy: the use of the technologies of print and other media of communication to analyze, critique, and transform the norms, rule systems, and practices governing the social fields of everyday life. (Luke, 2012)

Empathy: sensitivity and recognition of what emotion another person or character is feeling in a way that one imagines himself in the person"s or character"s place. (Wilson, 2008; Paiva et al., 2005)

Essentialism: *"the view that categories have an underlying reality or true nature that one cannot observe directly but that gives an object its identity."* (Gelman, 2003)

Facial expression: a mode by which meaning is conveyed through facial features including direction of gaze, head-movement, face touching, and lip and eye position (MODE, 2012)

Gesture: the use of the hands and other parts of the body for communicative purposes (MODE, 2012)

Image: is a visual mode which refers to the reproduction of something which retains similarity of features. It refers to both material entities as photographs, drawings, monuments and films, as well as „mental images" in dreams and memories (MODE, 2012)

Informal interview: a research tool in the form of a conversation between the interviewer and the participants in which key issues relevant to the research are discussed. The interviewer is free to explain and modify the number and sequence of questions and their wording (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2011)

Layout: the arrangement of entities in two or three-dimensional spaces (MODE, 2012)

Live action films: films in which real people and animals are filmed instead of models or images drawn or produced by computer.

Mixed methods: An approach using a combination of the qualitative and the quantitative method (Creswell, 2003)

Modal affordance: the distinct potentialities and limitations offered by a mode (Jewitt, Bezemer, & O'Halloran, 2016)

Modes: Semiotic resources for making meaning which are socially and culturally shaped. Modes of making meaning include; image, writing, layout, music, gesture, moving image, speech and soundtracks (Kress, Mode, 2010)

Multimodality: approaches that understand communication and representation to be more than about language, and which attend to the full range of different communicational forms/ semiotic resources which people use (Jewitt, Bezemer, & O'Halloran, 2016; Jewitt, 2011)

Panels/ Picture panels: are single drawings or individual frames depicting a frozen movement, some of which serve to set up the punch line in cartoons (Raskin & Ruch, 2008).

Parasocial relationships/ interactions: emotional connections or imaginary relationships which viewers develop with media characters. (Rosaen & Dibble, 2008)

Pilot study: *"an investigation that takes place before the main investigation and which is designed to test and evaluate the effectiveness of the research procedures"* (Newby, 2014)

Prejudice: formation of opinions about members of a group based on perceptions of intergroup differences. (Rhodes & Mandalaywala, 2017; Pereira, Estramiana, & Gallo, 2010)

Prosocial behaviour: voluntary behaviour exhibited by a character which is meant to benefit another character (Padilla-Walker, Coyne, Fraser, & Stockdale, 2013)

Punch lines: part of the text of a cartoon which has a surprising incongruity which sometimes may be completely resolved to understand the joke (Raskin & Ruch, 2008)

Questionnaire: a structured format which generates a response from individuals by asking them specific questions (Newby, 2014)

Reliability: replicability of the data collection processes and the results (Leung, 2015)

Semiotic domain: any set of practices that makes use of multiple channels of communication (e.g. images, sounds, gestures, etc.) to communicate distinctive types of meanings. (Gee, 2004)

Silent cartoons: cartoons without sound, produced in the silent era. (Barrier, 2003)

Social realism: the extent to which a media character or event is likely to occur in the real world. (Rosaen & Dibble, 2008)

Speech: a mode by which meaning is made through the use of sound, words, sentences which are organised through a sequence in time. (Kress, 2010)

Sterotyping: making assumptions about category members that they share particular traits (Rhodes & Mandalaywala, 2017)

Thematic analysis: a method for identifying, analysing and interpreting different „themes" in qualitative data (Braun, Clarke, & Terry, 2014)

Themes: recurring concepts or ideas within a set of data which have meaning or significance in relation to the aims of the research (Freeman & Sullivan, 2019)

Triangulation of data: implies the use of multiple sources of evidence in the data

collection process, which improves the research reliability and validity

(Creswell, 2014; Newby, 2014)

Validity: the accuracy of the data collection process in measuring what it is intended

to measure (Newby, 2014)

Writing: a distinct mode which has semiotic resources as punctuation, type and

indentation (MODE, 2012)