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Building Life-World Connections during School Booktalk

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ABSTRACT *In criticism of children's literature, notions of 'fantasy' and 'realism' are pivotal. In school 'booktalk' conversations, pupils referred to what is 'real' in three different ways: (i) by referring to feelings or semblance of 'real' life, (ii) by invoking shared facts, and (iii) by making references to personal experiences. In cases when teachers or pupils initiated so-called text-to-life or real-world connections, two types of dilemmas occurred. First, engagement was at times bought at the cost of quite literal reader responses. At other times, engagement was accomplished at the price of intrusiveness. There was thus, a delicate balance between life-world references, on the one hand, and literal readings or intrusion, on the other. Moreover, students sometimes resisted life-world probing, but volunteered privileged information about their parents, displaying different notions from teachers about legitimate information in a school context.*

Key words: *bookclubs; discourse analysis; reader response; realism*

INTRODUCTION

The present study concerns the interface between life worlds and text worlds in children's reader responses, during group discussions in a primary school context. The analysis, based on an empirical study of so-called *booktalk* sessions (Chambers, 1985/2000; Chambers, 1993/1999), showed that both teachers and pupils recurrently invoked notions of 'real' life (in Swedish 'verklighet') when moving between lived experience (life world), on the one hand, and fiction or literary experience (texts), on the other. Also, both teachers and pupils drew on the life-world and text-world interface, that is, on intertextuality in a broad sense as an important resource in classroom discussions.

In children's literature, the discussion of children's understanding of realistic and fantasy literature was at stake already in 1865 when Lewis Carroll published *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. This occurred at the turning point from Realism into Romanticism in children's literature (Shavit, 1986, p. 74).

One of the pioneers in the research field of children's literature is Zohar Shavit. She coined the notion ambivalent literature (Shavit, 1986) for texts that have an equivocal or ambivalent status, in that they simultaneously belong to two or more literary systems – for example the literary system for adults and that for children (e.g.

the original *Alice*). In contrast to children's literature, literature for adults may contain blurred boundaries between realism and fantasy, as in parody and satire. *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* was written with the ambition to make it sophisticated enough to be accepted by the adult literary system. It was, for instance, not clear whether Alice had dreamt or lived her adventures. In contrast, when Lewis Carroll adapted his original *Alice* into a univalent children's book, *The Nursery Alice* (1890/1966), the heroine was portrayed as someone who had merely dreamt her adventures.

Children's conceptions of what is 'real' in literature have been explored more recently. One example is Lee Galda (1992), who argues that children more easily enter the world of realistic fiction than fantasy. In work on young adult literature, Joanne Brown discussed students' and critics' notion of realism, which were, in both cases, shaped 'according to what they perceive as [the novel's] accurate correlation to its world of reference' (1999, p. 350).

There has also been some prior work on pupils' literature discussion groups and book clubs (e.g., Eeds & Wells, 1989; Evans, 2002; Raphael & McMahon, 1994; Short, 1986). Yet, the present study differs from most of the earlier work on reading and life-world versus text-world intertextuality in that it focuses on institutional booktalk practices, that is, on conversations, not on the participants or on reader responses *per se*.

In his discussion of adults' roles in bringing children and literature together, the acclaimed children's author and pedagogue Aidan Chambers (1985; 1993) claims that it is possible to bring children's worlds to the worlds of text through so called *booktalk* sessions. In such sessions, pedagogues and children jointly explore a book through discussions about the individual participants' text *preferences* (likes and dislikes), *puzzles* (what individual participants yet do not understand), and *patterns* (connections between and within texts), for instance, in *world-to-text connections*, that is, connections between texts and the everyday world (Chambers, 1993). In fact, citing an 8 year-old pupil, Chambers (1985/2000, p. 138) claims that 'we don't know what we think about a book until we've talked about it.' Yet, in the present situated context of classroom teaching, intertextuality and connections to pupils' lived experience were also related to some pedagogical dilemmas. In our discussion of the present data, we will document the nature of these dilemmas and discuss their pedagogical relevance for school booktalk.

Kristeva (1967) coined the term 'intertextuality' in her introduction to the writings of Bakhtin. Drawing on Bakhtin, she argued that any text can be read in a space defined by two axes (subject/author–addressee/reader), on the one hand, and a contextual axis, (text–context), on the other: 'any text is constructed as a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another' (Kristeva, 1967; Kristeva & Moi, 1986, p. 37). Thereby, her writing on intertextuality also contained an attack on essentialistic Aristotelian logic, e.g. categorizing the world in terms of fixed dichotomies such as real versus unreal.

As yet, little empirical work has, however, been done on the interface between children's life worlds and texts, employing explicit notions of 'intertextuality'. Several researchers on children's literature have employed a somewhat narrow

notion of intertextuality, reserving it for connections between proper texts from different media, thus not including lived experience (Sipe, 2000, p. 77). As some other recent research on intertextuality (*e.g.*, Cochran-Smith, 1984/1994; Lemke, 1992; Short, 1992; Wolf & Heath, 1992), we instead espouse a broad definition, including references both to other texts and to everyday experience (life). Chambers (1993/1999, p. 19) has called such references to everyday experiences *world-to-text* connections. He argues that, bringing the extra-textual world – our own world – to the text expands the meaning of life or of the text, or even of both. There are several early studies relevant to such a discussion of intertextuality, even if that very term has not been explicitly employed.

Drawing on an in-depth theoretical discussion of intertextuality, as well as on his own responses to a short story, Richard Beach (1998) claims that it is valuable to teach pupils ‘to connect their real- and text-world experiences.’ In the following, we will draw on Beach’s notions – *real world* and *text world* as they foreground the type of intertextual connections which are relevant for our present work. Yet, we are, of course, well aware of the need for bracketing what is ‘real’, and we will therefore refer to the *life world* (rather than real world). See also discussion on ‘real’ in Potter, Wetherell and Stringer (1984).

In a pioneering study, drawing on 100 story reading events from a field study in an American nursery school, Cochran-Smith (1984/1994, p. 169) discussed the interface between life-world and text-world references, distinguishing between two types of intertextuality: *life-to-text* and *text-to-life*. Most of the interactions during story reading involved pedagogues helping young preschoolers to understand particular texts through allusions to the life world and various kinds of extra textual information. Cochran-Smith called such activities life-to-text interactions, in which ‘the story reader was teaching the listeners how to make sense of text by bringing to light the extra-textual information they needed in order to make inner-textual sense’ (Cochran-Smith, 1984/1994, p. 173). It is thus a question of referring to life – typically experienced or possible events in mundane, everyday life – in order to understand literature, (for instance, the teacher would refer back to an illustration, ‘you have to watch the pictures and see what happens’, or present crucial information related to the fictive characters, ‘do you know that sheep have to pant very madly’). Finally, in text-to-life interactions, children were informally socialised into how to use literature for making sense of everyday life (Cochran-Smith, 1984/1994, p. 169-173). When reading Mercer Mayer’s *There’s a Nightmare in my Closet*, the teacher, would, for instance, encourage the children to talk about having nightmares and being afraid of darkness. Cochran-Smith studied preschoolers, and she documented many examples of life-to-text and text-to-life references.

In another ethnography, Wolf and Heath (1992) have similarly explored the interface of life and text, but in mother-child dialogues in the lives of three young children through their early childhood. They showed how texts provided important means for the children’s ways of coping with everyday problems.

In a school context, Kathy G. Short (1992) studied literature circles in grades 1–6. Her study was motivated by what she saw as a dearth of work on intertextuality in naturalistic contexts. The children in her study discussed intertextual references

of all types, literary elements, illustrations, authors' lives as well as the their own personal experiences.

Maryann Eeds and Deborah Wells (1989) similarly found that 'recounting of personal stories inspired by reading or discussion' was a dominant category in their study of 5th and 6th grade pupils' social interactions in literature study groups. They noted that talking about literature in 'personal ways seemed to help students develop the personal significance the text had for them' (Eeds & Wells, 1989, p. 18).

The present study concerns school pupils, who are still learning how to read fiction in a literary manner, including how to relate text-worlds to life. In the following, booktalk sessions will be analysed as a type of social interaction. In particular, the analyses will focus on different ways of discussing life and 'real' in school booktalk. Part of this analysis will concern intertextuality between life and text worlds, and some dilemmas related to discussions of life worlds in a school context.

METHOD

The present data are *naturalistic* in the sense that the conversations would have occurred even if the researcher had not been involved.[2] The centre of attention of the present study is conversations or talk-in-interaction in an educational setting, that is, discursive data. Within a theoretical framework of discursive psychology, booktalk (like other conversations) is seen as a type of social action (cf. Potter, 1996; Potter, forthcoming). The present work therefore combines work on children's literature with some of the analytical approaches of discursive psychology. In their work on literature and social psychology, Jonathan Potter, Peter Stringer and Margaret Wetherell (1984) argue that an interactional perspective would 'unfreeze' literary study; thereby stressing the social and political context of literature. Yet, Potter *et al.* (1984) did not present empirical data on, for example, interpretative practices and social interaction. Our work can partly be seen as an extension of their work in that it examines conversational practices concerning literature.

Ethnographic Information on the Valley School and Local Booktalk Procedures

The present study documents booktalk discourse at a Swedish school, the Valley school that is a municipal elementary school, which has worked with reading support at all levels for ten years. As an obligatory part of the regular curriculum, the school runs *book clubs* (in Swedish 'läsecirklar') that are inspired by Chambers' (1985/2000; 1993/1999) approach. When this study was carried out the teacher-librarian at the school introduced the book club activities in each class by presenting 7–8 book titles that she assumed would be popular for the ages concerned, that is, 10- to 14-year-olds. The books also represented different degrees of difficulty, and a proposed book was often the first in a series. The pupils chose four books and arranged them according to their preferences. Later, their choices formed the basis for organisation of the groups.

Each club gathered for about 30 minutes, three times in a fortnight. During the first session, the teacher presented the chosen book more in-depth to the pupils and

talked about the author and the content of the story. In addition, the pupils were asked why they had chosen the book in question, and what their expectations were, and the initial part of the book was read. Either the teacher read aloud, or the pupils took turns. As a preparation for the second session, the pupils were to have read the first half of the book and completed grade-specific tasks at home, such as identifying the main characters. After yet another week, the third and last session was held.

In one of the first ethnographic reader-response studies conducted, Janice Radway examined a community of female romance readers. She found that (1984/1991) the readers preferred realistic settings and ‘extraordinary’ plots (plots with fantasy elements). The present eight books (read in the booktalk sessions) all have realistic settings. In four cases – *Kampen om Visby* (Lindblad-Nelson, 1995), *Nikki – min vän grävlingen* (Burkett, 1972/1985) and *Isnatt* (Sørille, 1989) *Nonni och Manni* (Svensson & Telemann, 1989) – the plots are realistic as well. The plots of the other four books are mainly realistic but contain fantasy[3] elements.

Recordings, Transcriptions[4], Coding and Analysis

During one school year, the first author (KE) video-recorded 24 booktalk sessions (3 sessions/group). The recordings involved 8 different groups of 3–8 pupils in 4 classes in grades 4–7, that is, pupils aged 10–14 years. In all, forty pupils (20 girls and 20 boys) and 5 teachers (4 females and 1 male) participated. However, it is the booktalk practices in which these persons participated that constitute the primary analytic units of the present study.

In order to investigate the reading responses, of which, according to Chambers (1993/1999), talk is the most essential part, all book club sessions were recorded.[5]

We have followed the recommendations of Potter and Wetherell (1995) making *in extenso* transcriptions of the entire data set. Thereafter, we have indexed the roughly transcribed material – in all about 450 A4 pages – drawing on the transcriptions, and repeated viewing of the videotapes. In this process, it became clear that the participants recurrently oriented to issues related to what is ‘real’. All such occurrences were systematically identified and transcribed in greater detail (cf. Transcription symbols, note 4). Finally, a native English-speaking professional translator translated the examples chosen. All names have been changed in order to maintain the participants’ anonymity.

WAYS OF BUILDING LIFE-WORLD CONNECTIONS

In the present booktalk conversations, the text world was constantly related to the life world. It was, in fact, found that the participants – the pupils as well as the teachers – implicitly or explicitly oriented to ‘real’ in all book club sessions. References to what is real were accomplished in three different ways: (i) by referring to feelings or semblance of ‘real’ life (Excerpt 1), (ii) by invoking shared facts (Excerpts 2 and 3), and (iii) by making references to personal life experiences (Excerpts 4–6).

Feelings or Semblance of ‘Real’ Life

In many cases, participants would claim that they ‘felt’ as if text events were real events. Such feelings were intimately related to the illusory qualities of literature, that is, to what extent it creates a semblance of realism, a semblance of ‘living’ the text.

Excerpt 1. Group 6A:3 (i.e. grade 6, group A, session 3). Participants: Lena, Gerd, Rut, Siv, Dora, Bo, Paul, Sten and MARY (teacher). Book: *Eldens hemlighet*[6] by Henning Mankell (1995). (Tape 11: 0.46.46.)

- | | | |
|---|---------|--|
| | 1. MARY | What do you say Rut what made the greatest impression on you? |
| → | 2. Rut | It was so real that you could see pictures like though there weren't any so (x). |
| | 3. MARY | And Gerd? |
| → | 4. Gerd | Well just like Rut said like you could almost ima:gine what ha:ppe:ned (.) like (.) you could- it it was ya know like like a film sort of but like °(it didn't do it)° and then well what's it called when they lost so many like that they lost pretty many in such a short time and all (.) so I felt pretty sorry for Sofia then. |
| | 5. MARY | What made the greatest impression on you then Lena? |
| → | 6. Lena | Well it felt so real that you- it felt like you were there in the book so I couldn't stop reading. |

When the teacher asks the pupils about what made the 'greatest impression' on them, Rut discusses how the fictive events were so 'real that you could see pictures like though there weren't any', and Gerd alludes to film-like qualities. Both girls thus spontaneously speak of a text's illusory nature as a positive quality. Visual metaphors for accomplishing 'real' have also been invoked by subjects in prior research, which can, for example, be seen in the title, 'Seeing is believing' (1998), of Lucy Norton's exploration of characters' 'looking' in a fantasy young adult novel. The 'lifelike' or illusory mimetic quality of a text is evidently an important aspect of what creates high involvement for the pupils concerned (cf. Rut, turn 2; Gerd, turn 4), which can also be seen quite clearly in Lena's final comment about a text being so 'real' that 'it felt like you were there in the book so I couldn't stop reading' (turn 6). These three readers apparently referred to semblance of living the text, that is, to feelings of seeing, hearing or living the events, evoked during their own reading experience. Deep involvement was thus linked to high assessments of realism (and to positive assessments of the text as such).

Shared Facts as Arguments for what is 'Real'

In several sessions, the participants explicitly discussed in what ways texts were 'real', invoking notions of realism, contrasting such notions with 'unreal.' In these discussions, 'real events' (in Swedish 'verkliga händelser') were often preferred to 'unreal' events or the fantasy genre.

The book discussed in our next example *Hjälp! Boan är lös* (Zak, 1987), is a

realistic adventure story with some fantasy elements, about a young man and his 11-year-old friends, smuggling a rare boa snake back to Guatemala, from where it had once been taken to Sweden.

Excerpt 2. Group 4A: 3. Participants: Inga, Mats, Bert, Tony, and MARY (teacher). Book: Hjälp! Boan är lös by Monica Zak (1987). (Tape 2: 0.23.56.)

- 1. MARY This book ((*The Lost Wreck*)) you're talking about now uh do you think it's real or does it seem like fantasy?
- 2. Mats Think it's pretty much uh both really.
- 3. MARY What about this book then? ((Picking up *Hjälp! Boan är lös*, holding it in front of her)) Is it [real or is it-]
- 4. Mats [>It's unreal.<]
- 5. Inga Yeah unreal.
- 6. Bert (xx)
- 7. MARY Bert you think it's both when Mo-
- 8. Inga (xx) this.
- 9. MARY Yes- when Monica Zak was here she told us she actually knew that people had smuggled snakes from South American into Sweden.

When asked by their teacher to classify the book as 'real' or 'unreal', two pupils, Mats and Inga, end up discarding the book as 'unreal' (turns 4 and 5). In contrast, the teacher tries to argue in favour of the 'realism' of the book by recounting that the author had, in fact, heard of someone smuggling snakes into Sweden from South America (turn 9). By discussing what is indeed possible, she is invoking 'possible' life as it were, demonstrating that the text in fact draws on life-world experience. The teacher thus uses her own 'factual' knowledge to construe 'real' in the conversation. In telling the pupils that the book is not all that 'unreal', she can be seen to try to make it more attractive to the pupils. There is evidently an underlying assumption that 'unreal' texts are less interesting than texts dealing with authentic life-world experiences. What is real is more interesting than fantasy or pure fiction. Such an attitude is quite consistent with much of literature for children in the middle school years, which consists of realistic fiction and didactic literature rather than fantasy fiction (Shavit, 1986).[7]

On some occasions, teachers or pupils invoked notions of what could have taken place, that is, to possible facts. The pupils thus did not necessarily draw on their own past experiences as standards of truth, but on what someone might have experienced, that is, invoking their standards for classifying text-world events as imaginable or *possible* lived experience. In the following, we will present such a case (Excerpt 3). In the book sessions studied, the teachers, for instance, recurrently tried to evoke identification between pupils and same-aged fictive characters. In Excerpt 3, the teacher initiates a discussion about what would have happened if 'you were the boy' and the events in the book had actually taken place.

Excerpt 3. Group 7B: 3. Participants: Pia, Lisa, Elias, Ulf, Nils, Klas and ALLAN

(teacher). Book: *Pojken och den vita sköldpaddan* by Joy Cowley (1986). (Tape 7: 0.31.04.)

- 1. ALLAN Why is that- I mean if if you imagine that that ((Clears his throat)) it was you that you were the boy now and you'd been pulled beneath the water and disappeared there (.) and they rode around looking, if they didn't find you, what do you think would happen in reality so to speak if it didn't turn out that-
2. Ulf? You'd[die.]
3. Nils [Dro]wn.
4. Pia (1) No:
5. Boy Well you can (xx).
6. Pia If (he) is a good swimmer then he probably wouldn't die.
7. ALLAN But how- but how- lo[ng] how long=
8. Elias? [(xx)]
9. Nils? [(xx)] o:h
10. ALLAN =can you survive under water without air then, even the very best free diver how long do you think they can survive under?
11. Ulf Three minutes.
12. Klas Maybe three four minutes at the most.
13. ALLAN I don't really know exactly how long but it's not- it's a matter of minutes really [it really is]
14. Klas [°hum°]
15. Ulf Yea:h.
16. ALLAN Maybe five.
17. Klas °hum four five something like that° ((Clears his throat.)) but they did search for him pretty long.
18. ALLAN Uh huh
19. Ulf? Yeah.
20. Pia Yeah not- °well I don't know°
- 21. ALLAN So you can imagine that he died then?
22. Klas °Uh huh°
23. Ulf °Yes.°
24. ALLAN <(It was such a)> it was a difficult e- ending [it wasn't- it wasn't]- it doesn't say what happens.
25. Elias? [(xx)]
26. Elias? Nope (x)
27. ALLAN No, it doesn't.
28. Klas You have to imagine (it your)self.
29. ALLAN Yes, you have to do that <you know> it's really uh (.) interesting to hear what you all are thinking though
30. Elias Huh

When the teacher invokes the life world ('if you were the boy'), Ulf and Nils both

answer that one would have died (turns 2 and 3), whereas Pia proposes that a good swimmer could have coped (turn 6). The teacher persists, and after a continued discussion, he sums up that the boy would, in fact, have died (turn 21). Apparently, he tries to make the pupils understand that they would actually have died if they jumped off a boat like the main character. Both in turn 1 and 22, the teacher invites the pupils to use their imagination to evoke the life world, bridging the gap between text and life. He is thus trying to accomplish 'real' by invoking a possible life-world event.

Through his opening question, the teacher can be seen to invoke the pupils' life-world experiences. In Cochran-Smith's (1984) terminology, this involves a *text-to-life* reference, when the teacher draws on the text in order to understand life. Yet (as can be seen here), it is hard to determine if the teacher's focus is on the life or the text (Cochran-Smith: *life-to-text*) without knowledge of his specific intentions. This is an important reason why it is less ambiguous to merely speak of a continuous intermingling of real-world and text-world references (cf. Beach, 1998), without specifying what is the main focus – life or text.

In a school context, the teacher's cautious remarks are quite natural, as he can be held accountable for what is recommended in schools. School time fiction is therefore, at times, subordinated to super ordinate discursive rules about what can be said. In didactic or school contexts, fantasy is often under siege, as Jacqueline Rose has warned us:

The opposition is clear. Didacticism against pleasure, narrative against rhyme, true stories against fantasy. It is one which often occurs in contemporary discussion of children's fiction. If fairy tales are pleasurable, they are useless since, unlike didactic stories, they do not teach children about the real world. This might be one of the reasons why Bettelheim felt obliged to argue for fantasy in terms of the most educational *use* to which it could be put and the contribution which it makes to the child's mastery of the real world. (Rose, 1984/1993, p. 55)

Rose is somewhat polemic. Yet, she eloquently points to one of the dilemmas of fiction in educational contexts. Ultimately, teachers can be held accountable for what pupils pick up in ways that magicians, poets or bards cannot. In an examination of educational dilemmas, Michael Billig *et al.* (1988) discuss how so-called discovery learning and other child-centred elicitation methods paradoxically also contain elements, associated with 'indoctrination' and transmission models: 'So, the very process of child-centred elicitation, of conceptual midwifery so keenly espoused by the liberal educationists, contains also the predetermined curriculum, the character training, social values and constraints of the opposed camp.' (Billig *et al.*, 1988, p. 63) Warning children about the risks associated with possible action is, of course, an important aspect of schools' 'character training' and transmission of social values. Ultimately, all the present booktalk sessions and all discussions of what is possible do take place in a school context, which means that the teachers are, indeed, implicitly accountable (to parents and authorities) for what takes place, and then not only for the choice of text, but also for the ensuing discussions.

Personal Experiences as 'Real'

In the present booktalk sessions, teachers and pupils covered broad areas of everyday life, discussing hassles and hardships, as well as love and death. As discussed, the teacher

recurrently invoked the pupils' lived experiences of the world (cf. Excerpt 3, and Excerpts 4 and 6 below), eliciting life-world references. These discussions recurrently drew on the participants' lived experiences. In other cases, the children themselves spontaneously discussed their life worlds. To varying degrees, such experiences also involved personal aspects of the children's lives.

Four of the eight books discussed in the book clubs featured animals as central figures and teacher questions, at times, focused on family pets and other animals (Excerpt 4).

Excerpt 4. Group 4A: 3. Participants: Inga, Mats, Bert, Tony, and MARY (teacher). Book: *Hjälp! Boan är lös* by Monica Zak (1987). (Tape 2: 0.09.58.)

-
1. MARY Some of you have had animals
 2. Mats I have had.
 3. Inga Uh I haven't.
 4. Tony I have.
 5. Bert I have.
 6. Inga Or have (.) but at our country place and so my cousin-
 7. MARY Does one do everything for one's pets?
 8. Bert I did when I had one.
 9. Tony I have to say when we had my dinner table outside in the summer like and if a cat comes along and so I say when some- we for example who only will u:h if we're inside and have a mouse outside then I don't think you should have it in case some cat or something comes and uh maybe he can come in there anyway even if it's closed.
 10. MARY °U:h huh°
 11. Mats °-have to write about it now° I had a guinea pig.
 12. MARY Uh huh↑
 13. Mats But it it was so old it was- would have been five years that's quite (.) old and then he had some disease so what do you call it when we were on holiday we were going to have him put down anyway go to the doctor then right but then during the holiday when he was at Grandma's he died (.) so he got to die by himself.
 14. MARY °Huh° (Taping on the open book)

As can be seen, the teacher invites pupils' references to the life world by asking the pupils to talk not only about the animals in the book, but also about their own animals (turn 1). When asked about whether one would do everything for one's pets, Tony raises an important moral topic about long-term commitments to pets (turn 9) that also engages Mats, who starts to talk about when he had a guinea-pig, who was very old and about to die (turns 11 and 13). Both boys are highly involved in

recounting their personal experiences of commitment to pets. Yet, the teacher responds in a somewhat noncommitted, minimal fashion ('uhu', turns 10, 12 and 14). This can be interpreted as if she anticipated response that concerned sacrifices or other activities that were more specifically related to 'doing everything for one's pet' as in the fictive text world of the hero, who even smuggles his rare boa back to Guatemala. As it is, the teacher eventually changed into another topic. This topic shift ends the pupils' discussion, that digresses from the text world to the life world. The teacher literally brings the pupils back to the text when taping on the book (turn 14).

Some discussions about life-world events covered areas that could be seen as *private* or privileged personal information (to the children and/or to their parents). For instance, one group discussed smuggling across the Swedish border. When the heroine of the text, Anna, was caught for smuggling her foundling cat, her father was at the same time, also caught for smuggling three bottles of alcohol.

Excerpt 5. Group 4B 2. Participants: Julia, Sara, Mia, Ida, Dan, and SUE (teacher). Book: *Smuggelkatten* by Lasse Ekholm (1990). (Tape 3: 0.50.23.)

1. Sara Yeah right he had- he had smuggled in-
2. Mia Ah
3. SUE Yes he had- ((Laughing.))
4. Sara Three bottles
5. SUE But which was worse then? Smuggling a kitty or smuggling alcohol? (.) What did they (.) the customs men there say?
6. Mia That uh it was worse to smuggle in a cat than to smuggle in alcohol.
7. SUE (xx) that was done- almost everybody smuggled a little alcohol.
8. Mia Yeah.
9. SUE It really wasn't any large quantity.
- 10. Mia My dad did it too.
11. SUE You don't say.
12. Sara ((Laughs))
- 13. Dan My dad does too.
14. SUE I under-
15. Mia A whole suitcase full.
16. SUE A whole suitcase full.
17. Dan (x) (.) he put them in with the bath towels.
18. Mia Yeah. ((Giggles))
19. Dan And then he made the swimming cushions.
20. Mia Yeah that's what he did with Alexander's bathing trunks he crammed in a bunch there so they were soaked when we came home 'cause they had leaked. ((Giggles))
21. SUE I understand but in any case there was no cat in your luggage when you came home

As can be seen, two of the participants, Mia and Dan, spontaneously and gleefully report at length about their fathers' smuggling of alcohol (turns 10–20), thus invoking their life worlds. Extended discussions of life-world experiences, at times, involved an educational dilemma in that life-world issues became more absorbing than text issues, to 'taking over' text discussions as it were. Chambers (1993/1999, p. 112) comments on the necessity of bringing pupils back to the text. In our present data, a basic dilemma of life-world discussions had to do with pupils moving away too much from the text into life-world digressions when discussing texts. For instance, pupils at times started to discuss concrete life-world events (about exact numbers, technical matters, and various other matters), moving away from the text as such, which seemed to be about to happen here. In any case, the teacher Sue eventually initiated a topic shift: 'I understand but in any case there was no cat in your luggage when you came home' (turn 21), bringing the pupils back from the life world to the text world. In a school context, (see also, Excerpt 4), the teacher constantly has to orchestrate the discussion, maintaining a suitable balance between life worlds and texts.

The discussion about smuggling alcohol was apparently quite fascinating for several children. At the time of the data collection, there were still rather severe restrictions on how much tax-free alcohol one could bring into Sweden, and, in a school context, most parents would probably not want their children to reveal details of their past smuggling. It can be noted that the pupils, not the teacher, initiated the topic of smuggling. Potter and Wetherell (1994) have discussed how hypothetical variation might clarify discursive meaning. On a speculative note, the teacher in the present excerpt could have asked the pupils about the smuggling habits of their parents. Such questioning about private matters would have been seen as offensive and overly intrusive to the adults involved (the absent parents as well as the teacher).

In contrast to the pupils' gleeful discussion of their parents' smuggling – an aspect of their parents' private life worlds – we can, in the final excerpt (below), inspect how the pupils react to the teacher's exploration of their private lives. It can be seen how the pupils reacted with resistance to questions about their private life worlds, (here: their ways of helping out at home).

Excerpt 6. Group 6A: 2. Participants: Lena, Gerd, Rut, Siv, Dora, Bo, Paul, Sten and MARY (teacher). Book: Eldens hemlighet by Henning Mankell (1995). (Tape 11: 0.21.28.)

- 1. MARY If you were put in that situation (.) that you-
 2. Bo Uh huh
 3. MARY -had to work first and go to school later.
 4. Bo Uh huh
 5. MARY Would that be a good arrangement for you?
 6. Bo But school was in the afternoons.
 7. MARY Yes.
 8. Bo °<ye'ah> (.) It would be okay.°
 9. MARY So you wouldn't have anything against working first starting at six a.m. and
 Then going to school at two in the afternoon (.) I see.

10. Bo But they still got up that early even if they didn't go to school.
11. MARY What does Gerd have to say, you're smiling a bit when Bo talks like that hehe
12. Gerd Well right I mean we've got it real good if you like think about it.
- 13. MARY °U:h huh° (2) what do you think Lena? Do you ever think about this? (1) Do we just take things for granted? (.) That we get to go to school and that we don't need to work and help out at home? (2) How many of you help around the house?
14. ((All pupils but Bo and Sten raise their hands))
- 15. MARY What do you do at home Siv?
16. Siv All sorts of things bu- different.
17. ((Bo and Dora are whispering and scribbling))
18. MARY Do you help out every day?
19. Siv Yeah hehe I guess I do.
20. ((Three turns removed from the excerpt))
21. MARY Do you help out every day?
22. Siv (xx) hehe
23. MARY Really how much time does it take what you help out with at home?
24. Siv It depends sometimes it takes more time.
25. MARY And what is more time?
26. Siv ((Laughs)) Not so long.
27. MARY An hour (.) two hours.
28. Siv One at least (it takes) tee-
29. MARY It takes at least one hour (.) every day.
30. Rut (xx?) ((Giggles))
31. Siv No: hehe I don't (.) know it depends.
- 32. MARY Dora helps around the house too (.) do you help out every day?
33. Dora No at weekends.
34. MARY How-
35. Dora Weekends.
36. MARY Yes.
37. Dora Laundry.
- 38. MARY You do the laundry. (.) Yes, well- that sounds good (.) Bo how do (.) you help out at home?
39. Bo °Uh° not so much.

In this episode, the teacher apparently tries to set a new perspective on the pupils' own lives. She does this by encouraging the participants to compare their lives with those of refugee girls in Mozambique, taking the perspective of other persons. In

Cochran-Smith's words this can be described as eliciting text-to-life interactions. She explicitly calls on Bo (turns 1–9), Lena (turn 13), Siv (turn 15), Dora (turn 34), and ultimately Bo for a second time (turn 40). Yet, as can be seen, all four pupils display different types of resistance to her detailed questions about their helping out at home. Bo evades the question by answering in a literal manner (turn 10), and Lena does not respond at all (turns 13–14). Siv and Dora provide minimal and noncommittal responses (turns 16 and 35), avoiding the underlying core question of whether they would like to work before school.

It is not possible to conclusively determine why the pupils react with resistance, but most likely, it has to do with their notions of what is private or public in their life worlds. From the teacher's perspective, the text apparently offers a handy occasion to discuss the privileged position of Western children, who, at large, do not have to work. Yet, from the pupils' perspectives, information about helping out at home can probably be seen as a type of highly private and extremely sensitive information. Peers may laugh at a pupil who helps out too much at home, and Swedish school-age children may be quite harsh in their judgments of mother's helpers or teacher's pets.

Moreover, and perhaps more importantly, the teacher seems to gather information about the children's private experiences in order to make a moral point in the life world, a life-world point, and not a literary point or point about the text as such. She can be seen to employ a literary text as a point of departure for offering the pupils advice about their lived worlds. Apparently, the teacher is here primarily trying to influence their minds (through the text) and, in so doing, she is more didactic than we have seen in the other examples. Several factors thus distinguish this final example from the others.

Like in Excerpts 3 and 4, the teacher here invoked the pupils' life-world experiences to accomplish 'real', in the present case (Excerpt 6), however, the pupils did not volunteer life-world references, which means that she failed to involve them. As in Excerpt 4, it can be seen how the teacher alone cannot decide whether a life-world question will indeed initiate an exploration of the interface between text and life. In a classroom context, access to pupils' life-world experiences is, ultimately, a matter of teacher-pupil negotiations, in that pupils may, at times, refrain from offering any personal life-world contributions, which means that teachers' life world initiatives will be aborted.

On other occasions, however, the pupils happily initiated discussions about classroom romances, and other issues that could obviously be seen as quite private. Also, other booktalk discussions concerned personal sensuous memories of, for instance, sleeping with a warm kitten under the blanket. What was sensitive and not sensitive was part of the booktalk collaboration.

Chambers has discussed that it is important that both pupils and teachers agree that everything is honourably reportable:

And readers must feel secure and significant when telling the story of their reading. They must know that nothing they say will be misused or turned against them, that they will be listened to and respected – and not just by the teacher, but by everyone else in the group as well. They must know that everything they want to tell is honourably reportable. (Chambers, 1993/1999, p. 47)

In the present groups, the pupils apparently felt quite secure in that they spontaneously raised quite private matters, *e.g.* talk about classroom romances. Yet, other private issues were, in fact, sensitive.

CONCLUSIONS

On the basis of the present data, we have discussed ways of talking about ‘real’ (*e.g.* as feelings, facts or personal experience), and the architecture of intertextuality. Moreover, we have identified some related educational dilemmas.

In the booktalk practices, the teachers recurrently tried to bridge the gap between life and texts by invoking the pupils’ life worlds in order either to primarily understand the *text* (*life-to-text* references), or to show the pupils how to better understand their own life worlds, that is, *text-to-life* references in the terminology of Cochran-Smith (1984/1994). The classroom discussion would move freely back and forth between life- and text-worlds (*cf.* Excerpt 3), and, on other occasions, what was apparently intended as a discussion on the life world (*e.g.* children’s responsibilities; Excerpt 6) never quite took off, as the pupils, at times, resisted probing about their private lives. In naturalistic classroom conversations, it was thus analytically difficult to differentiate between what was the primary direction of the discussion (*life-to-text* or *text-to-life*). Cochran-Smith’s (1984/1994) work was one of the first empirical studies that foregrounded notions of ‘real’ and intertextuality, but her subtle distinction between two distinct types of intertextual directions did not hold up in the situated classroom conversation of the present data. This is, we believe due to the dialogical nature of intertextuality. Whether a group would primarily talk about the text world or the life world or both is not up to one party alone (*e.g.* the teacher). Whether booktalk did, in fact, develop into an exploration of intertextuality was instead a sequential affair, part of the dialogue as such.

At times, there is a dilemma between invoking pupils’ life worlds and digressing from the text. Another and more delicate dilemma concerns teachers’ exploitation of pupils’ life-world references, on the one hand, and maintaining an appropriate social distance, respecting pupils’ privacy, on the other (Excerpts 4–6). By bringing pupils’ personal, and even private, life-world experiences into the classroom, teachers, at times, transgress the boundaries between public and private affairs. Part of the reason is that adults do not always understand what constitutes sensitive vs. non-sensitive information for children. What is sensitive or privileged information for a 10- or 12-year-old may seem quite unproblematic to an adult. Discussions about personal experiences therefore risk becoming overly intrusive. In the present data, this could be inferred from the pupils’ resistance to specific areas of investigation, such as the questions about household chores.

Literature discussions have often involved moral issues (*cf.* Eagleton, 1996; Love, 2001). When the literary text is seen to be employed didactically as a way of enlightening pupils (Excerpt 3), or as a type of ‘character training’ (*cf.* Billig *et al.*, 1988), pupils may react against the moral messages involved. In booktalk sessions, moral issues may create high involvement. Yet, pupils may also react negatively to moral didactic dimensions. The earlier mentioned Shavit (1986) has criticized children’s literature for being overly didactic. The present booktalk discussions can be seen as a type of reader-response phenomena, informing us that young readers themselves, at times, perhaps share such a criticism. Life and text are

interwoven in subtle and intricate ways. When discussing text worlds, it is not possible to talk without simultaneously talking about lived realities.

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NOTES

- [1] Correspondence: e-mail: kater@tema.liu.se; Phone: +46 (0)13 28 29 10; Fax: +46 (0)13 28 29 00.
- [2] Eeds and Wells (1989) also call their study naturalistic, yet they initiated the analysed literature study groups themselves and selected the teachers in training leading the discussions. Short (1992) refers to her own study as authentic, yet she conducted her studies as an active co-learner, teacher and researcher.
- [3] Drawing on the definition of fantasy as “involving the supernatural or some other unreal element”
- [4] Transcription symbols are mainly based on conversation analysis and discursive psychology (Edwards, 1997): []; Square brackets mark the start and end of overlapping speech; underlining, emphasis, with the extent of underlining within individual words locating the emphasis; **bold**, pronunciation differs from surrounding speech, e.g. irony, theatrical; CAPITALS, mark speech that is obviously louder than surrounding speech; °..°, quieter speech; (n), a pause, with n indicating the time in seconds; (.), micro pause; ((Text)), transcriber’s comments; :, Prolongation of preceding vowel; > <, speeded-up talk; < >, slower talk; =, immediate “latching” of successive talk; –, utterance interrupted or ebbed away; (. . .), talk has been omitted from a data extract; (text), uncertain interpretation; (x) (xx), Inaudible word or words; hehe, laughter.
- [5] Due to technical mistakes the recordings lack sound in three cases (5A1:3, 5B2:3 and 6A1:3). In all, 21 book sessions were transcribed.
- [6] Translations of titles can be found in the reference list.
- [7] We may perhaps need to modify our discussion about a realistic bias after the global success of J.K. Rowling’s (1997, 1998, 1999, 2000, 2003) *Harry Potter* series. Yet, it can be pointed out that just as in the case of the female romance readers Radway discusses, the boarding school setting of the Harry Potter books are, on the whole, quite realistic. There are a few magical objects, but, at large, the fantasy elements are mainly located in the plot (Tucker, 1999).

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* Original titles in parentheses; brackets signal that the book does not exist in English, in these cases we have translated the title.