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Avid versus struggling readers: co-construed pupil identities in school booktalk

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Abstract

In the present paper, we argue for a combination of reader reception studies and discursive psychology that we would like to call *discursive reception studies*: that is, discursive-psychological analyses of reader reception data. Such approaches provide possibilities to analyse the role of social interaction in the co-construction of the reading of a given book (or talk on a film or other reader reception data). Drawing on detailed analyses of video-recorded teacher-led booktalk sessions in grades 4-7, pupils' self presentations and other types of co-construed categorizations of readers are examined and discussed in relation to the pupils' and teachers' co-construction of two contrasting categories of reader positions: *avid readers* (*bokslukare*; literally, book-devourers), on the one hand, and *struggling readers*, on the other. These categorizations in turn involve two different sets of continua in terms of the participants' (pupils') spontaneous positionings: one based on motivation (willing versus unwilling readers) and one based on reading speed (fast versus slow readers). Both sets of contrasting categories involve implicit local hierarchies, yet these two continua do not necessarily overlap. An important finding is that the position of a fast reader does not imply the position of a book-lover. Through detailed examinations of the participants' co-construed local hierarchies in booktalk, this study documents ways in which discursive reception studies may contribute to a deeper understanding of reading as a situated social practice. Our findings have implications for teacher training, with respect to the promotion of literary reading among children.

Keywords: *booktalk; categorizations; discursive psychology; discursive reception studies; identity-in-interaction; identity work; reader positions; reader reception.*

I Introduction: research on children and young people as readers¹

Drawing on ethnographic classroom data, Hade (1991) documents ways in which children who have basic reading skills may develop – or not – into people who read for pleasure. Some children develop basic reading skills but do not advance into readers who chose books by themselves, or who spontaneously speak about books or read out pieces to others. These children remain *poor, slow, low* or *struggling* readers (Alvermann, 2001, Hade, 1991, McCarthy, 2001, Triplett, 2007). Other reader identities include, of course, those at the opposite end of the scale, such as *strong, fast, avid* or *high* readers (McCarthy, 2001: 129). Mackey (1991) discusses a case study where she shows how a young girl becomes an avid reader when encountering the fictive world of Ramona (a heroine in books by Beverly Cleary), and how, during an intensive fortnight, she devours several of

the series of Ramona books, talking about them with her family, looking up difficult words, and reading out funny bits; displaying what the poet Auden has called *passionate attention*. The reading *practices* of avid readers like her have been less discussed than those of slow readers. Reader *identities*, on the other hand – and the ways in which they are shaped in social interaction – have been little studied, whether with regard to avid or to slow readers.

In line with Alvermann (2001) and Bloom and Katz (1997) it can be seen that reader identities and literacies are cultural constructions. Hade (1991) discusses how reader identities may be partly grounded in prior classroom experiences – for instance, in experiences of being laughed at when reading aloud (poor readers) or in experiences of *belonging to* a community of readers (literary readers). Hade also provides extracts of classroom dialogues. Otherwise, classroom dialogues have primarily been documented when presenting children's involvement with specific texts, as when they are constructing or deconstructing gendered texts (Davies, 1997, Wing, 1997, Yeoman, 1999).

We would argue that reader identities are partly grounded in educational talk-in-interaction (see Benwell and Stokoe (2002) on academic identities). Identities are thus to be studied in terms of co-construed positionings (Antaki and Widdicombe, 1998, Aronsson, 1998). It would therefore be worthwhile to carefully examine the ways in which reader identities are displayed in classroom conversations and the ways in which they are talked into being through the contrasting stances set up by participants and co-participants. The findings of such a study might, for instance, inform the training teacher training programmes with regard to the promotion of literary reading. A basic assumption is that reading should be studied discursively in terms of *reader positions*, rather than in terms of fixed reader identities. Therefore, the present study has adopted a discursive approach to researching how reader positions are displayed and talked into being in booktalk.

2 Discursive psychology

Methodologically and theoretically, the present work draws on discursive psychology, which has in turn been informed by ethnomethodology and conversation analytic approaches towards social interaction. One point of departure for these theoretical perspectives is the principle that text and talk are to be treated as social practices (cf Edwards and Potter, 1992). A common type of study in this area concerns talk in institutional settings, such as university tutorials (Benwell and Stokoe, 2005) or pupils' peer assessments in problem-based learning (Cromdal et al., 2007).

In contrast to experimental and cognitive approaches to psychology (see Edwards, 1997 for a critique of the latter), discursive psychology advocates the study of naturally occurring interaction. In the present case, booktalk was studied without the researchers' taking any part in the organisation of the booktalk sessions, in that the regular teachers chose the books, put together the groups and carried out the booktalk reading sessions in the same way as they would have done if the researcher and video camera had not been there. At the time of each

session, the researcher (KEB) arranged the video camera, and on some occasions an additional audio recorder, and left the room. The participants were of course aware that they were being recorded, which might have had some impact on the booktalk sessions. Even so, the point is that the conversations were not initiated by the researchers but by the teachers and the pupils: that is, the regular participants or members themselves.

In promoting a detailed study of naturally occurring situated conversations, discursive psychology encourages us to bring a dual focus to booktalk analyses: a focus on interactional resources and sequential practices as such, on the one hand, and a focus on readers' displayed preferences and ideas, on the other. For instance, such analyses have shown the value of examining topics related to stereotypes and otherness in real-life reading settings. In a study of how the 'Other' was co-created in booktalk sessions (Eriksson and Aronsson, 2005), discourse analysis of the institutional practice – book club in school – made it possible to see tensions and dilemmas around notions of the 'Other' (see also Lang, this issue).

We argue that discursive psychology can provide systematic tools and notions for analysing talk that can be useful for literary scholars, including stylisticians. Discursive psychology equips the scholar with tools for analysing *reading-in-talk*. One advantage of drawing on discursive psychology and discourse analysis when researching reception is that the detailed analysis of the interaction reveals how the participants co-create a joint reading of a literary text (see Fish, 1980/1998), talking their reading into being. On a radical note, this suggests that there is no pure reader reception, merely reader reception talk (or writing), in that there is no other reading that we can know about. This also reflects real life phenomena: 'reception' is deeply embedded in talk, and in social relations: Pierre Bourdieu (1968) points out that aesthetic judgments depend on a process of socialisation. By contrast, earlier theorizing on reception has focussed on individual responses to literature (Chambers, 1985/2000), while other work has examined ways in which texts open up toward different types of reading (Potter et al., 1984), and very little work has primarily focused on how reading emerges during conversations (but see Allington, 2007, Eriksson Barajas, 2008, Eriksson, 2002, Eriksson and Aronsson, 2004, Eriksson and Aronsson, 2005).

3 Data

3.1 Ethnographic setting

The data were collected as part of a discursive study of reader responses in a naturalistic school context, so-called book circles (Swedish: *läsecirklar*), that involved a teacher and between three and eight pupils in grades 4–7, aged 10–14 years. Each group of pupils met with their teacher on three occasions, as part of regular school activities, reading aloud from and discussing a book that they had chosen from a set of books presented by a

teacher-librarian. All discussions were led by one of the teachers, who was inspired by Chambers' reasoning on 'booktalk' and his basic idea that you have not properly read a book until you have discussed it with somebody else (Chambers, 1993/1999). Chambers' aim is to make children enjoy books.

3. 2 recordings, transcription and analysis

During one academic year, the first author (KEB) video-recorded 24 booktalk sessions, involving eight different groups and three sessions per group. In all, 40 pupils (20 girls and 20 boys) and 5 teachers (4 females and 1 male) participated. However, it is the *booktalk practices* in which these people participated that constitute the primary analytic units of this study. In order to investigate the reading responses, the entire book club sessions were recorded. We followed the recommendations of Potter and Wetherell (1995), making *in extenso* transcriptions of the entire data set (in all about 450 A4 pages).

In line with Dickerson's methodological recommendations in his discursive study of news viewers (1996), we have focused on sequences where the participants positioned themselves in contrasting ways in relation to previous speakers, in order to see how reader positions are contrastively oriented to in the sequential structure of talk. Moreover, contradictions and tensions within a single participant's constructions of his/her local identity have been used as tools for making contrastive analyses.

Validation of our analyses was accomplished by studying the participants' uptake of and orientation towards prior statements in the conversation. This is a key methodological principle of discursive psychology and is argued to anchor the analysis in the participants' own perspectives on the interaction. Analyses of deviant cases are also vital to discursive psychology, as are sequential analyses of coherence across utterances and episodes. Moreover, the presentation of detailed transcriptions in publications allow other analysts to evaluate and re-evaluate the material (Hepburn and Potter, 2004: 190).

After searching through the material, we identified five sequences in which the participants oriented to distinct reader positions. These sequences were transcribed in greater detail, and the transcriptions cover overlaps, emphasis, loudness, pauses, and prolongation of sounds and latching.² The extracts are headed with information about grade, group, session, book discussed, tape and time, and participants (names have been pseudonymized). The translated transcripts are kept as close as possible to the Swedish original words. When needed, the Swedish originals are also presented, e.g. in the case of emic terms such as '*bokslukare*'.

4 The co-construction of an avid reader

Ethnographic background information on the teachers involved and their overall goals revealed that one of the primary aims of the present booktalk activities was to turn as many pupils as possible into '*bokslukare*'

(Swedish: literally ‘book devourers’), that is, readers who revel in reading, devouring books in large numbers. This is in contrast with other eating-related metaphors of reading as the slow savouring or relishing of a loved section of a book (Nell, 1988). In one of the present booktalk sessions, it is implicitly invoked when the teacher and pupils jointly discuss time for reading in that the teacher asks if Sonja feels ‘peckish’ (line 6).

Excerpt 1

Group 6B:1.³ Participants: Sonja, Vicky (girls), Max, Tobbe (boys) and their teacher Britt (T). Book: *Nonni och Manni* (Svensson and Telemann, 1989). (Tape 12: 0.16.13.)*

- 1 T: -perhaps a bit more during the weekend coz then
- 2 You’ll have more ti:me ((discussing how to
- 3 plan one’s reading time))
- 4 → Vicky: °yes, maybe two chapters°
- 5 → Sonja: >°I can finish the entire book today.°<
- 6 T: (pause) do you feel peckish? ((Sw:sugen))
- 7 ((friendly voce; turns towards Sonja))
- 8 Sonja: °uhm° ((nodding))
- 9 Pupils: ((soft laughter))

* Arrows indicate pupils’ self-positionings as readers.

The teacher (lines 1–2) has been discussing when the pupils are supposed to read the assigned book, suggesting that they might read a bit more of the book during the weekend. In *sotto voce*, Vicky spontaneously comments that she will probably be able to read two chapters (line 4). Sonja continues but indirectly outperforms Vicky in that she reveals that she would be able to read the entire book on that very day (line 5). Thereby, it can be seen that the two girls have indirectly established two contrasting versions (Dickerson, 2000) of ‘time for reading’, that, in fact also involve a provisional local hierarchy, where one of the girls has positioned herself as a fast reader, whereas the other one has positioned herself as a slow reader.

The teacher chooses not to comment on the two girls’ contrasting projected reading abilities, or on the idea that Vicky will just be able to finish two chapters of a children’s book during an entire week, including the weekend. Instead, she turns to the fast reader Sonja, asking her ‘*känner du dig sugen*’ (line 6), which literally means ‘do you feel peckish?’ (or ‘are you hungry?’), a question that is, of course, quite in line with the overall food metaphor of *bokslukare* (book devourer). To feel peckish can be seen as a *category bound activity* (Sacks, 1992) in relation to a book devourer. Someone who is a book devourer is also bound to feel hunger for books. The teacher’s comment can be seen as a type of repair work in that she focuses on Sonja’s high motivation or lust for books, thereby reinterpreting what could have been seen as bragging on the part of a high speed reader.

Fast reading is thus reinterpreted in terms of a high reading motivation (love of books), instead of in terms of high achievement or bragging. This teacher intervention is not contested by the participants. In any case, Vicky and the other children respond in terms of soft laughter, displaying their alignment with the teacher's reframing.

Somewhat later during the same session, Sonja, in a *sotto voce* comment, again mentions that she has in fact read 3 books in two days.

Excerpt 2

Group 6B:1. (Tape 12: 0.28.48.)*

- 1 → Sonja: °I finished 3 books in 2 days.°
- 2 ((pause))
- 3 O→ T: Are you a true (.)- ((turning with an
- 4 expression of keen interest towards Sonja))
- 5 Max: I also [tend to- xx
- 6 T: [book [devourer?
- 7 → Vicky: [I do not like to read.
- 8 T: Don't you? ((eager happy voice, with a
- 9 friendly look toward Vicky))
- 10 Vicky: ((chuckles)) No:o↑ ((shakes her head and
- 11 chuckles smilingly))
- 12 → Sonja: °I like to read and then I write as well.°
- 13 → Max: I lo:ve to read. I'm read[ing-
- 14 → Vicky: [It depends on what
- 15 it is.
- 16 O→ T: Tobbe loves to read [too? ((turning towards
- 17 Tobbe))
- 18 → Max: [detective stories
- 19 T: No:o? ((doubtful tone))
- 20 → Tobbe: No::: it's- xx I never set about reading- when
- 21 I know that I have to read (.) then I finish
- 22 It (.) right away
- 23 T: Yes yes.
- 24 Tobbe: I do not know xx if I like it xx since I've
- 25 Never done it
- 26 → Max: I like to [read-
- 27 O→ T: [I thought that you like [to read
- 28 ((to Tobbe))
- 29 Max: [Mankell
- 30 → Sonja: °I lo:ve to read° ((looking at her teacher))
- 31 Tobbe: Xx
- 32 T: What have you been reading now? ((to Max;

33 *looking at Max*))
34 Max: I'm reading *One Step Behind*, now
35 T: That one is good *((whispering tone of voice))*
36 → Sonja: I only read horse books - in my bookshelf
37 There are only horse books (.) *((laughing*
38 *Voice; speaks louder than before))*
39 T: You like that. (.) you belong- *((turns for the*
40 *First time in a while towards Sonja))*
41 Sonja: But they are not only about that, I have like-
42 from Pollux! So a lot of horse books.
43 Tobbe: A book without a horse is a bad book.
44 Sonja: *((chuckles))*
45 Pupils: Uhu!! (.)

* Arrows indicate pupils' self-positionings as readers; O→ indicates other-positioning of reader.

The teacher turns explicitly to Sonja, asking whether she is 'a true book devourer' (Swedish: *bokslukare*; lines 3, 4, and 6). Again, Vicky presents a contrasting version, confessing that she, unlike Sonja, does not like to read. Sonja latches on, confirming that there is a divide in motivation in that she likes to read – and to write (line 12). Yet Max outperforms her in saying that he 'lo:ves to read' (line 13). Thereby, he contrastingly (cf Dickerson, 2000) positions himself as a more avid reader than Sonja.

As discussed by, among others, McCarthy (2001), skilful reading is often equated by observers with being highly motivated to read. But motivation does not necessarily imply enjoyment. In contrast to Max and his unqualified love of reading, Vicky says that her reading depends on the type of texts involved (lines 14–15). Tobbe does not confirm that he 'loves to read', as suggested by his teacher's tag question (line 16). Instead, he apparently finishes a book right away if he knows that he 'has to read (it)' (lines 20–22).

In response to Vicky's theme on favourite readings, Max avows that he prefers detective stories (line 18), like those of Henning Mankell, a Swedish bestselling author of detective stories involving serial killings, and other types of violent action.

At this point, Sonja also confesses that she 'lo:ves to read' (line 30), much as Max did earlier in this sequence. Both children have thus positioned themselves as unconditional book lovers, as book devourers as it were. It is first after these initial positionings that they both confess that they prefer detective stories (Max) or that their love concerns but one category of books: 'only horse books' (Sonja; line 36). Tobbe presents a so-called reformulation of Sonja's position – 'a book without horses is a bad book' (line 43) – with which she laughingly aligns herself.

Within this series of self confessions, Tobbe is the odd one out in that he publicly presents himself as someone who is not a book devourer. Unlike the two self-professed book lovers, Tobbe does not confess to preferring a type of books. He reads fast, but only if he has to. He does not really know if he 'loves to read' and

he does not have any favourite type of reading matter. In fact, he seems to see the reading of fiction as something that just has to be done. As can be seen in her doubtful tone of voice ('no:o?', line 19), his teacher seems to be somewhat taken aback. As he claims to be a fast reader, she just assumed that he is also an avid reader. On a scale of 'love' or reading motivation, he thus presents himself as the least motivated pupil:

<i>Love of reading</i>	<i>Reader position</i>	<i>Pupils displaying position</i>
High	Lo:ves to read	Max, Sonja
↑	Likes some texts	Vicky, Max, Sonja
Low	Reading if one has to	Tobbe

Figure 1. The participants' co-construed scale of love for reading.

Obviously, to be a '*bokslukare*' means that someone moves toward the top of the scale. Unconditional love is a large part of being a book devourer. However, such love is culturally bound. It seems to be a matter of gender (Moss, 1993) and of class (Moss, 2000) or local cultural practices (Heath, 1983/1991). Informal literacy practices do not necessarily translate seamlessly into school literacy practices for both working class and middle class children (Moss, 2000). It has been argued that bedtime stories prepare children for different attitudes toward books (Heath, 1982), and that an easy and carefree intercourse with books seems to be part of what has recently been discussed in terms of middle class patterns of *concerned cultivation* (Lareau, 2003).

As can be seen, the different levels of love for reading are not mutually exclusive. In fact, two pupils, Max and Sonja position themselves both as book lovers (top level of this local hierarchy) and as people who like *some* books (intermediate level). In prior work, it has been shown that pupils display different reader identities in relation to formal or informal reading (Moss, 2000). In ethnographic work on readers, it has also been shown that pupils recreate their subjectivities when task or group compositions changes (McCarthy, 1998: 126), or in relation to distinct teacher contributions (Triplett, 2007: 97) or the learning environment (Möller, 2004/2005). Here, Max and Sonja display distinct and slightly contradictory reader positions within the very same booktalk session despite the fact that neither the task nor the group compositions or teacher changes.

5 The co-construction of a struggling reader

In terms of academic performance, the present classroom discourse seems to project two types of readers, the avid reader or '*bokslukare*' on the one hand, and a slow or unmotivated reader, on the other.

In line with social constructionist work on disability (McDermott and Varenne, 1995), disability can be seen as something that is partly constructed within social interactions. In classroom contexts, academic poor performance has been conceptualized in terms of, for instance, *slow readers* (or readers with low motivation),

disabled readers and *at risk readers* and more recently, also in terms of *struggling readers* (Alvermann, 2001, Triplett, 2007).

Excerpt 3

Group 6B:2. Participants: Vicky (girl), Max, Tobbe (boys) and their teacher Britt (T). Book: *Nonni och Manni* (Svensson and Telemann, 1989). (Tape 12: 0.33.44.)

1 T: -iinstead you try to utilize your time
2 *((talking about not postponing reading until*
3 *the last night))*
4 → Vicky: I started last Wednesday
5 T: You did
6 Max: Me too
7 → Tobbe: Me too (.) I both started and finished in one
8 Night
9 T: Did you finish it (.) [in one night?
10 Tobbe: [yes (.) or I read maybe
11 one hour the first day when I got home from
12 school and then I read like [maybe-
13 Max: [I think-
14 Tobbe: -for 45 minutes=
15 Max: =that it feels=
16 Tobbe: =in the night=
17 Max: =to read.
18 T: Was it hard work? *((looks with interest at*
19 *Tobbe))*
20 Tobbe: *((shakes slowly his head laterally))*
21 → Vicky: Like it takes half an hour for me to read 2
22 chapters.
23 Max: xxx *((turned towards Tobbe))*
24 → Tobbe: I read fast
25 T: Uhu but Vicky we have to respect (.) each
26 other and that some people take plenty of time
27 (.) and need plenty of time
28 Vicky: *((nods in agreement))*
29 T: The main thing is of course that you manage to
30 read it
31 Vicky: Uhu
32 T: So the text is not too difficult. Because then
33 it's hard work to be sure, when you have to
34 struggle with every page. But you do fix this

35 Vicky: Uhu
36 O→ T: -that it takes a little bit more time for you,
37 I think that is (.) it's nothing that you can
38 do so much about. You develop your reading
39 speed to be sure, the more you read the faster
40 [you read
41 Tobbe: [the faster it goes.
42 T: But that's quite another matter, but you have
43 of course come so far that you manage quite a
44 thick book now.
45 Vicky: Uhm ((nodding))
46 T: >There you go!< and you then Max ((turns
47 towards Max))

During this second booktalk session, two students spontaneously discuss the time it takes for them to read the assigned book. Vicky volunteers that she 'started (to read)' on Wednesday, thereby indirectly confessing that she did not finish it during the same night. In contrast, Tobbe reveals that he finished the entire book in one single evening. When the teacher asks him if this was hard work – if it was '*jobbigt*' – Tobbe shakes his head laterally (line 20), indicating that it was not.

At this point, Vicky contrastingly confesses that she needs half an hour for about two chapters. Thereby, she can be seen to position herself in terms of a contrasting position of someone for whom reading is perhaps '*jobbigt*' (hard work). Tobbe then spontaneously adds that he 'read[s] fast' (line 24). Obviously, reading will be harder on someone who is a slow reader. Yet neither Tobbe, nor Vicky herself spell out that she is a slow reader. However, the teacher indirectly orients to Vicky's slow reading when she comforts her, pointing out that you have to respect that people need different amounts of time for reading (lines 25–27), and that the more you read, the faster you will read (lines 38–40). Tobbe eagerly aligns with the teacher in underlining the relation between practice and speed of reading (line 40). Thereby, both the teacher and Tobbe downgrade any moral burden of being a slow reader, reinterpreting slow reading as a matter of practice. Slow readers are instead indirectly cast as potential readers or 'not yet' readers, who just need more practice. In connection with his work on communities of readers, Hade (1991) has discussed the notion of *class texts*, that is, readings that are locally ratified as appropriate text interpretations. In the present data, there seem to be something like *class reader positions* in that the teacher Britt positions Tobbe as an avid reader (Ex.2), and Vicky as a slow reader (Ex.3). It seems to be a teacher's prerogative to categorize class reader positions. Although most reader positionings are made by the pupils themselves (note self-positioning arrows above, as well as below, Excerpts 4 and 5), if anyone positions someone else it is the teacher (as in Ex 2:line 15 or Ex. 3:line 36, and Ex. 5:line 7) and not any of the co-present pupils, except in one case, where the teacher and Vicky co-construe a reader position for Max (Ex.5:lines 7–11).

In another group, involving pupils who were one year older, Anja (like Tobbe) volunteered that she finished the assigned book on 'the first day' (lines 1–3):

Excerpt 4

Group 7A:2. Participants: Åsa, Eva, Anja (girls), and their teacher Mary (T).

Book: *Isnatt* (Sørllle, 1989). (Tape 6: 0.10.06.)

- 1 → Anja: But I can not say that now, I don't really
2 know. I finished it on the first
3 day so-
4 Pupils: Uhu
5 Åsa: The first day↑ ((in a sceptical voice; turning
6 towards Anja, facing her and staring at her))
7 Anja: Uhu
8 Åsa: ((tosses her head and turns her gaze away with
9 A somewhat sneering smile))
10 Eva: ((trying to secure eye contact with Åsa,
11 chuckling))
12 T: Uhu he gets the ba:g?
13 Anja: >Then I'll just be done I thought<

In response to Anja's report about finishing the book the first day, her classmate Åsa is quite sceptical (lines 5–6), and in fact, abruptly turns away and looks in another direction with a sneering smile. Anja cannot see this smile, but she probably orients both to her class-mate's tone of voice and to the way in which she abruptly turned away her face. In any case, Anja then apparently tries to down-grade the potential bragging quality of her fast reading, when she adds 'then I'll just be done' (line 13).

Her account of her fast reading can be seen as a type of repair action, an excuse (Scott and Lyman, 1968) for her fast reading. She does not complete the book on the first evening because she loves reading; she just wishes to get an obligatory (school) assignment done. Thereby, she can be seen to produce a *stake inoculation* (Potter, 1996: 125). She inoculates herself toward negative responses from her class-mates (e.g. for bragging).

In any case, she obviously orients to a type of contrastive work that continuously seems to be going on in the present booktalk sessions (and in much other school work that has been observed in Swedish group work among adolescents; (e.g. Tholander and Aronsson, 2003, Tholander and Aronsson, 2002)). Students recurrently compare themselves with others, both seriously and jokingly, and they orient to others' potential bragging through teasing (Tholander and Aronsson, 2002).

It is notable that well-established notions about pleasurable reading and speed are absent in the discussions; for example, Victor Nell (1988: 99-100) writes about reading-rate flexibility. Readers may read passages that they like much very slowly and increase the speed to skim pages of less interest. Nell describes it as a U-shape: the enjoyment is highest at a medium reading speed and decreases at very low *and* very high speed.

In their constant comparisons between one another, the present students set up a series of contrasts between book lovers and others (Excerpts 1 and 2), and between fast readers and others (Excerpts 3, 4 and 5). As documented in the present data, grade 7 as well as grade 6 pupils can thus be seen to orient to both reading speed and willingness/unwillingness to read. Yet, as implied by the comments by both Tobbe (Ex. 3) and Anja (Ex.4), fast reading cannot be equated with avid reading or an unconditional love of books or even, ironically, with successful reading. At the same time, though, it can be noted that the pupils and their teacher recurrently co-constructed local hierarchies in terms of reading speed positions.

Group 6B:1. (Tape 12: 0.27.15.)

1 T: At least there ((talks about how far the
2 children shall read)) then if you want to you
3 can do as (.) Tobbe (.) says read the whole
4 book tonight ((pause)) just go ahead [but
5 → Max: [I'll
6 probably [read-
7 O→ T: [I do not think that you will do:
8 that but maybe you will read
9 O→ Vicky: half↑
10 T: half↑ (.) it depends of course a bit on how
11 eager you'll be
12 ((The teacher and her pupils talk with great
13 Involvement about how easy or hard different
14 books are to read; the teacher tells that she
15 do not care about a book if she has not
16 gotten into it after 70 pages))
17 Max: Seventy pages↑ ((looking at Tobbe))

12

Within this specific booktalk session (Excerpts 1–3 and 5), the participants can be seen to establish a hierarchy of reader positions in terms of reading speed: fast readers, who may finish a book within one evening; half-as-fast readers who might finish half the book; and finally, starting readers, who would just be able to start reading on the first day.

<i>Reading speed</i>	<i>Reader position</i>	<i>Pupils displaying position</i>
Fast	A book within one evening	Sonja, Tobbe
↑	Read half a book	Max
Slow	Starting a book	Vicky

Figure 2. The participants' co-construed scale of reading speed (within one evening's reading).

It should, of course, be noted that these categorizations draw on the participants' own categorizations that are co-construed as part of their booktalk interactions with their teacher and co-present group members.

Why is reading speed so important? It is important for the pupils' planning of their reading. But it is also implicated in the local hierarchies that emerge in classroom talk. Both pupils and teachers contrast distinct reader positions in relation to other readers, and in relation to preferred and dispreferred types of texts.

7 Concluding discussion

In brief, it can be seen, the group members spontaneously positioned themselves both as fast or slow readers (Figure 2), and as willing or unwilling readers (Figure 1). Most confessions to being a fast/slow or willing/unwilling reader emerge as the spontaneous uptake of peers' testimonies about reading. When classmates talk about themselves as readers, others spontaneously present contrasting versions. Thus, classroom talk can be seen to involve the emergence of local classroom hierarchies in terms of reading speed and reading motivation or reading willingness.

On the other hand, what can also be seen is that the pupils carefully avoid categorizing other pupils. At the most, they will implicitly make such categorizations, as when Vicky predicts that Max will read half the book (line 9). The pupils might be aware of the co-participants' local identities as slow or fast readers, or as unwilling or willing (book-devouring) readers. Yet there is a clear local preference for self-confessions. This is in line with other recent work on pupil talk in informal school work (e.g. Cromdal et al., 2007) that testifies to a marked dispreference for pupil assessments of other pupils.

Lastly, and most importantly, reading speed tends to be confounded with passionate reading. Both teachers (eg. Ex. 2), in line with public discourse on reading and some prior research have confounded speed of reading

with a willingness to read or love of reading. Not coincidentally, folk theories, fossilized in lexicalized categorizations, imply links between reading speed and passions: someone who is a *bokslukare* is both a fast reader and a passionate one. Moreover, adjectives like *sugen* (literally: hungry) implicate indiscriminate passion for books. Yet, as has been documented in this paper, reading speed cannot be equated with an unconditional love of reading. This knowledge could, for instance, be a useful element in teacher training programmes, to counteract the idea, clearly emerging in the booktalk analysed above, that fast is good and faster is better.

The present findings involve a situated study of children's reading of fiction, and detailed analyses of ways in which pupils spontaneously position themselves in terms of local hierarchies. At the same time, it also constitutes a methodological contribution to discursive reception studies. By studying natural interaction, it is possible to discover how children in everyday situations learn to interpret and analyse books; documenting what they find interesting or worth mentioning. If discursive psychology is applied in a consistent way in reception research, both fields will be enriched through a genuinely interdisciplinary approach: reception research will gain a systematic and adequate way to collect and analyse naturally-occurring data, while discursive psychology will be confronted with and enriched by data from so far relatively unexplored practices.

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Appendix I Swedish originals

Excerpt 1

1 T: -kanske lite mer i helgen för
2 Då har man mera ti:d ((förklarar hur man
3 ska läsa över tid))
4 Vicky: °ja, kanske två kapitel°
5 Sonja: >°Jag kan läsa ut hela boken i dag.°<
6 T: ((paus)) Känner du dig sugen? ((vänlig
7 röst; vänder sig mot Sonja))
8 Sonja: °Mhm° ((nickar))
9 Children: ((småskrattar vänligt))

Excerpt 2

1 Sonja: °Jag läste ut 3 böcker på 2 dar.°
2 ((paus))
3 T: Är du en riktig (.)- ((vänder sig med ett
4 Intresserat ansiktsuttryck mot Sonja))
5 Max: Jag brukar [också - xx
6 T: [bok[slukare?
7 Vicky: [Jag tycker inte om å läsa.
8 T: Det gör du inte? ((nyfiken glad röst, tittar
9 vänligt på Vicky))
10 Vicky: ((småskrattar)) Nä:ä↑ ((skakar på huvudet och
11 Småskrattar leende))
12 Sonja: °Jag tycker om och läsa och så skriver jag.°
13 Max: Jag ä:lskar å läsa. Jag håller [på- ...
14 Vicky: [De' beror på va
15 det är för nåt.
16 T: Tobbe älskar å läsa [också? ((vänder sig mot
17 Tobbe))
18 Max: [deckare
19 T: Nä:ä? ((tvivlande ton))
20 Tobbe: Nä::: det blir- xx jag tar mig aldrig för att
21 läsa- när jag vet att jag måste läsa (.) då
22 läser jag ut den (.) direkt
23 T: Ja ja.
24 Tobbe: Jag vet inte xx ifall jag gillar't xx för jag
25 har aldrig gjort de' xx
26 Max: Jag läser [helst-
27 T: [Jag trodde du gilla [å läsa. ((till
28 Tobbe))
29 Max: [Mankell

30 Sonja: °Jag ä:lskar å läsa° ((tittar på läraren))
 31 Tobbe: Xx
 32 T: Vad har du läst nu? ((till Max;
 33 tittar på Max))
 34 Max: Jag håller på med *Steget efter*, nu
 35 T: Den är bra ((sagt i viskande ton))
 36 Sonja: Jag läser bara häst böcker - i min bokhylla
 37 finns det bara hästböcker (.) ((skrattröst;
 38 talar högre än tidigare))
 39 T: Du gillar det.(.) du tillhör- ((vänder sig för
 40 första gången på länge mot Sonja))
 41 Sonja: Men dom handlar inte bara om det, jag har så
 42 här- från Pollux! Så en massa hästböcker.
 43 Tobbe: En bok utan häst, är en dålig bok.
 44 Sonja: ((småskrattar))
 45 Several: Hmhm!! (.)

Excerpt 3

1 T: -utan man försöker disponera tiden ((pratar om
 2 att inte skjuta upp att läsa till
 3 sista kvällen))
 4 Vicky: Jag börja i onsdags
 5 T: Du gjorde de'
 6 Max: Jag åsså
 7 Tobbe: Jag åsså (.) jag både börja och sluta på en
 8 Kväll
 9 T: Läste du ut den på (.) [en kväll?
 10 Tobbe: [ja (.) eller jag läste
 11 kanske en timma första dan när jag kom hem från
 12 skolan och sen läste jag väl [kanske-
 13 Max: [Jag tycker-
 14 Tobbe: -i 45 minuter=
 15 Max: =det känns=
 16 Tobbe: =på kvällen=
 17 Max: =att läsa.
 18 T: Var det jobbigt? ((tittar intresserat på
 19 Tobbe))
 20 Tobbe: ((vridet nekande på huvudet))
 21 Vicky: Asså det tar en halvtimme för mig å läsa 2
 22 kapitel.
 23 Max: xxx ((vänder till Tobbe))
 24 Tobbe: Jag läser fort
 25 T: Mhm men Vicky det måste vi ju respektera (.)
 26 varandra så att vissa människor tar väldigt god

27 tid på sig (.) och behöver väldigt god tid.
 28 Vicky: *((nickar instämmande))*
 29 T Huvudsaken är ju att du klarar av och
 30 läsa det
 31 Vicky: Hmhm
 32 T Så det inte är för svår text. För då blir det
 33 ju jobbigt, när man får kämpa med varje sida.
 34 Men det grejar du
 35 Vicky: Um
 36 T -att det sen tar litet tid för dig, det tycker
 37 jag är (.) det är inget man kan göra så mycket
 38 åt. Man tränar ju upp sin läshastighet, ju mer
 39 man läser desto snabbare
 40 [läser man
 41 Tobbe: [snabbare går det.
 42 T Men det är en annan femma, men du har ju kommit
 43 så långt att du klarar ju en ganska tjock bok
 44 Nu
 45 Vicky: Mhm *((nickar))*
 46 T >Där ser du ju!< o du då Max *((vänder sig mot*
 47 Max))

Excerpt 4

1 Anja: Men jag kan inte säga det nu, jag har inte
 2 riktigt koll på det. Jag läste ut den första
 3 dan så-
 4 Several: Mhm
 5 Åsa: Första dan† *((skeptisk röst; vänder huvudet mot*
 6 Anja och tittar henne stint i ögonen))
 7 Anja: Mhm
 8 Åsa: *((knycker på huvudet och vänder bort blicken*
 9 med ett lätt försmädligt leende))
 10 Eva: *((söker Åsas blick,*
 11 Småskrattar))
 12 T: Mhm han hämtar vä:skan?
 13 Anja: >Så har ja't gjort sen tänkte jag<

Excerpt 5

1 T: Mi:nst dit *((pratar om hur långt barnen skall*
 2 läsa)) vill du sen göra som (.) Tobbe (.)
 3 säger läsa hela boken ikväll *((paus))* så är
 4 det ju fritt fram [men

5 Max: [Jag kommer nog
6 å [läsa-
7 T: [De' tror jag inte att du gö:r
8 men du kanske läser
9 Vicky: Halva↑
10 T: halva↑ (.) de' beror ju lite på hur sugen man
11 blir (.)
12 ((T och eleverna talar engagerat om hur
13 lättlästa och svårlästa olika böcker är;
14 läraren berättar att om hon inte har kommit in
15 efter 70 sidor så bryr hon sig inte))
16 Max: Sjuttio si:dor↑ ((tittar på Tobbe))

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- 1 Research on reception and on reader response is a vast field; only a handful studies will be mentioned in the present paper. For an overview see for example Suleiman, S. R. and Crosman, I. (1980) *The reader in the text: Essays on audience and interpretation*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ. and Tompkins, J. P. (Ed.) (1980) *Reader-response criticism: From formalism to post-structuralism*, Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore. Henceforth, only the notion research on reception will be used in the present paper.
 2. Transcription symbols are mainly based on conversation analysis and discursive psychology Edwards, D. (1997) *Discourse and cognition*, Sage, London.; 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 excerpt; (text), uncertain interpretation; (x) (xx), Inaudible word or words; hehe, laughter.
 3. Group 6B:1 = grade 6, group B, session 1 of 3.