

Katarina Eriksson

Life and Fiction

On intertextuality in pupils' booktalk



FACULTY OF ARTS AND SCIENCES
LINKÖPINGS UNIVERSITET

2002

Linköping Studies in Arts and Science

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ISSN 0282-9800

Katarina Eriksson: Life and Fiction

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First Edition.

Graphic Design & Layout: Katarina Eriksson

Photo: Peter Jonsson

Cover: Jonas Larsson

Composition: Monika Thörnell

Print: UniTryck, Linköping, 2002

ISBN 91-7373-299-0

In memory of my grandfather Johan Eriksson

CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	11
1 INTRODUCTION	15
OVERVIEW OF THE THESIS	17
2 CHILDREN'S LITERATURE AND READER RESPONSES	19
DISCURSIVE PSYCHOLOGY	19
THEORY ON CHILDREN'S LITERATURE	20
Relation to adult literature 21 • Children's literature in the popular circuit 22 • The childist perspective 23 • Ghettoisation 25 • Children's literature as an imperialistic activity 25 • Research on children and literature in Sweden 26 •	
FROM THE TEXT TO THE READER	27
THE READER IN THE TEXT	31
LITERARY CONTRACTS	34
INTERPRETIVE COMMUNITY	37
AGE (STAGE) AND READING	37
CLASS	40
GENDER	41
THE INDIVIDUAL READER: THE READER'S MIND	42
PROBLEM FORMULATION	44
3 SETTING AND METHOD	46
SETTING	46
The school 46 •	
PARTICIPANTS	48
Pupils 48 • Pedagogues 48 •	
CHAMBER'S BOOKTALK METHOD	49
BOOK CLUB ROUTINES AT THE VALLEY SCHOOL	50
RECORDED BOOK CLUB EVENTS	54
RECORDINGS	54

TRANSCRIPTION AND TRANSLATION	56
Transcription conventions 56 •	
ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS	57
ON "NATURAL" DATA	58
ANALYTICAL PROCEDURE	59

4 BOOKS TO PROMOTE READING

A presentation of 8 narratives	64
INTRODUCTION: PROBLEM FORMULATION	64
NARRATIVE ANALYSIS	67
SETTING	68
POINT OF VIEW	70
CHARACTERS	70
PLOT	73
FICTION AND LIFE	75
The absent father 76 •	

5 BOOKTALK DILEMMAS

Teachers' organisation of pupils' reading	78
BOOKTALK PRACTICES AND MOTHER-TONGUE	79
BOOKTALK AS AN APPROACH TO READING	79
DISCURSIVE PSYCHOLOGY AND DILEMMAS	80
BOOKTALK DILEMMAS	81
METHOD	82
Setting and participants 82 • Recordings 82 • Book club routines 83 •	
Transcriptions 86 • Translation 86 • Using discourse analysis for	
analysis 86 • Coding of dilemmas 87 •	
CHILDREN'S CALENDARS VERSUS READING FOR PLEASURE	88
READING AS A SYNCHRONISED ACTIVITY AND READING	
FOR PLEASURE	93
OTHER SCHOOL PROJECTS VERSUS READING PROJECTS	96
Vocabulary lessons and reading for pleasure 96 • Reading aloud and	
reading for pleasure 99 •	

CONCLUDING DISCUSSION	102
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	103
REFERENCES	104
APPENDIX SWEDISH ORIGINALS	105

6 BEYOND STEREOTYPES?

Talking about gender in school booktalk	112
INTRODUCTION: CHILDREN'S LITERATURE AND GENDER	113
METHOD	115
Book club routines at the Valley school 116 • Recordings and transcriptions 117 • Coding and analysis 117 •	
MALE NARRATOR AS IMPLICIT NORM?	118
FICTIVE CHARACTERS AS IDEALS	120
Looking up to a fictive character 120 • Is he a sweet guy? 122 • To be like Anna or to be like the cat? 124 •	
GENDER STEREOTYPES AND IDEAL PARENTS	126
Mummy and her "little guy" 127 • Not a typical mum 131 •	
SUMMARY	134
REFERENCES	137
APPENDIX SWEDISH ORIGINALS	140

7 REALISM AND INTERTEXTUALITY IN SCHOOL

BOOKTALK	148
INTRODUCTION	149
SETTING AND METHOD	154
Booktalk procedures 154 • Recordings, transcriptions, and coding 156 •	
INTERTEXTUALITY	157
LIFELIKE EVENTS AS "REAL"	158
LITERAL EVENTS AS "REAL"	163
PERSONAL EVENTS AS "REAL"	167
DISCUSSION.....	175
REFERENCES	178
APPENDIX SWEDISH ORIGINALS	181

8 CONCLUDING DISCUSSION	189
REFERENCES	192
APPENDIX A PROPOSAL OF WORK PLAN FOR ACTIVITIES IN THE LIBRARY	206
APPENDIX B INFORMATION LETTER TO THE PUPILS' PARENTS	207
APPENDIX C INFORMATION SHEET ABOUT THE BOOK CLUB	208

Acknowledgements

In June 1996, I happily transformed the house-warming party for my brand new, first-hand lease apartment in Stockholm into a farewell party, since I had just received a letter of admission to the PhD program at tema Barn (the Department of Child Studies) in Linköping.

During my first year at the department, Bengt Sandin socialised me into the child perspective and the tema Barn ambiance. Gunilla Halldén's inspiring course became very important for my selection of a research path. In her capacity as then head of department, Gunilla forced me to decide upon a subject for my thesis in spring 1998, an act for which I am very grateful.

In 1998, Jonathan Potter gave a series of workshops on discursive psychology at tema Barn. His crystal clear and engaging lessons have had an enormous impact on my research.

In summer 1998, my then roommate Anna Sparrman and I began a collaboration that later became a project, led by Karin Aronsson.* Anna has provided invaluable support throughout my thesis writing; always helpful, she has shared my theoretical development, my enthusiasm over findings, and my pain during "writer's blocks". Moreover, Anna and I have discussed "the little life and its big issues". I greatly appreciate her friendship.

Out on the research field, I came in contact with a real enthusiast who skilfully and admirably made the *Valley School* a place with a remarkably clear book culture. I owe my largest debt for being able to complete this thesis to *Mary*, the participating teachers and pupils who generously let me video-record their rather private conversations about books.

Once I started writing my thesis, my colleagues had an immense impact on its development through their helpful remarks at seminars, etcetera. I especially want to mention Åsa Aretun, Asta Čecaite, Cecilia Lindgren, Roger Klinth, and Karin Osvaldsson in this connection. Jakob Cromdal, Thomas Dahl, Gisela Eckert, Anne-Li Lindgren, Anna Sparrman, and Karin Zetterqvist Nelson have, moreover, helped me with their insightful comments and arguments at critical stages of the writing process.

Throughout my PhD education at tema Barn, first the people that I began with – Thomas Dahl, Roger Klinth, Maria Simonsson, Anna Sparrman, Michael Tholander – then the whole PhD student collective have helped me to “endure” the challenging life as a PhD student. This help has been provided during therapeutic coffee sessions, lively social constructivist debates while eating dinner and many shared laughs over lunch.

I have also had the privilege to learn that Anne-Li Lindgren and Judith Areschoug are fun and considerate friends just to hang around with.

The opponent at my final seminar, Gunnlög Mäarak, had valuable criticism of my thesis manuscript that helped me in the final stages of writing.

When I wandered around tema Barn predicting various catastrophes that would hinder completion of my thesis, my supervisor Karin Aronsson repeatedly showed her confidence in me. And I’m pleased to see *she* was right! During frequent rereading, Karin has patiently struggled with transforming my cryptic writings into scholarly English. Among other things, she has taught me how to structure a scientific article. Karin’s critical eye always makes me sharpen my arguments. Moreover, I appreciate that I, very respectfully, have been allowed to arrange my daily schedule to suit my preferences: for example, taking slow starts with *caffelatte* at the library and hour-long reading sessions at Café Cioccolata.

Concerning transcriptions, library support, computer support, language revision, and proofreading, I wish to thank Elinor Svi-

berg, Christina Barge, Rosmarie Malmgård, Magnus Baurén, Ian Dickson, Linda Schenck, Karen Williams, Gisela Eckert, Carolina Øverlien, Anna Sparrman, Anne-Li Lindgren and Héctor Barajas.

Peter Jonsson, Jonas Larsson and Monika Thörnell generously used their skills to help me realise my vision of how the thesis should look.

On a private level, I would like to express my gratitude to Katarina Tiväng, Ulrika Sundström, Maivor Carlstam and all the other “broads” in Stockholm for their friendship, hospitality, encouragement and great times!

My parents Anneli and Örjan Eriksson as well as my siblings and their partners, Elisabet Eriksson, Ryan Harlin, Mikael Eriksson and Lisa Elmén have always expressed faith in my abilities and they have all been very supportive in various ways. Simon and Miguel Barajas have made me think about things other than research every other week, which has been healthy.

Finalmente, mi tesoro lindo Héctor Barajas, muchísimas gracias por todo tu amor y tu apoyo (y también por toda la comida deliciosa con que me consientes!). Bailame feliz!

K.E.

Linköping
March 2002

* The present thesis is part of the project “Kulturreception och socialisation – Samtalsanalys av kamratsamspel i skolmiljö”, funded by *The Bank of Sweden Tercentenary Foundation*, Bank of Sweden Donation (Dnr 1999-0341: 01-02).

INTRODUCTION

This was Jo's favorite refuge; and here she loved to retire with half a dozen russets and a nice book
(Alcott, 1868/1994, p. 32)

Since childhood, I have spent long hours lying stretched out on my bed reading. In literature, I seek pleasure, entertainment, or comfort and enlightenment concerning the complexities of life. During my undergraduate major studies in Arts and Humanities, I focused on existential issues in literature, as male/female love poetry in Swedish literature and the philosophy of life in short stories by Marguerite Yourcenar in French language studies. In many ways I can be seen as a prototypical academic person with humanistic orientation; an avid reader.

In contrast, children, at large, can not be assumed to be avid readers. But when children *do* read, what wisdom or pleasure do they in fact experience from literature? I myself do not remember specifically what I achieved from reading as a child, apart from a general positive feeling that made me want to read more, and more; I got “hooked” on books.

In fact, we do not know a great deal about what children and young readers themselves think and feel about literature. The focus of the present dissertation is children's talk about literature in a school set reading project, as a way of exploring children's reader responses. Readers' thoughts and feelings about books can

be seen as *responses* to literature. One way of studying reader responses is therefore to ask people what they think about a book. But I wanted to know about children's and young people's responses as they are expressed in everyday life.

As the title suggests, the starting point of the present study is the intersection between life and fiction. Literature treats life, and life can be enriched by literature, that is, fiction. Moreover, literature functions as an entry into existential issues, such as love, death and separation. In the current curriculum for Swedish compulsory schools, it is stated that “[l]iterature, films and the theatre help people to understand themselves and the world, and contribute to the development of identity” (Skolverket [National Agency for Education], 2001, p. 85). This leads us to the notion of intertextuality, which will be explored in the present thesis. A broad definition of intertextuality has been adopted, linking meaning making through texts to life experiences and vice versa.

At the time of the data collection, the cultural debate in Sweden was marked by a concern about the decreasing figures for the amount of reading done by children (cf. SOU 1997:141, 1997; Statens kulturråd [The Swedish National Council for Cultural Affairs], 1996). Book reading among 9- to 14-year-olds decreased from 13 percent of total media use on an “average” day in 1995 to 11 percent in 1998 (NORDICOM, 1996, 1999). When book-reading statistics are compared to those for use of other media, it can be seen that, for example, computer use and video watching have increased.

Parallel to this concerned debate runs developmental work integrating arts in all sectors of society. For children this means integrating arts into school, since school is, in fact, the largest cultural institution for children (Hansson, Sommansson, & Kulturdepartementet [Ministry of Culture], 1998). It is therefore interesting to know how this dominant institution presents literature to children.

Since 1994, the Swedish school system has prescribed book discussions within the subject of Swedish (Utbildningsdepartementet [Ministry of Education and Science], 1994). I therefore decided to collect my data in a school context. The overall purpose of the present study is to examine authentic group discussions about books in school. If, as in the present thesis, one intends to study reader responses as expressed in conversations, a scientific approach to talk is required. To this end, the present thesis takes an explorative approach, roughly corresponding to the empirical departure in the branch of discourse analysis known as discursive psychology. The present study therefore combines literary theory about the reader (reader-response criticism) with discursive psychology in order to understand how teachers organise book discussions and how pupils talk about books in an authentic setting, where literature plays a role.

Overview of the thesis

In Chapter 2, I present research and theories that constitute the background for this thesis, that is, particularly, discursive psychology and reader-response criticism. The data collection will be presented along with methodological considerations, in Chapter 3. Chapters 4 to 7 consist of four empirical studies. Chapter 4 presents the books that the children discussed, drawing on a narratological analysis. It thus provides a reading of the books based on literary theory. The remaining three studies are based on discursive analysis of children's booktalk as it took place in an informal school setting. First, Chapter 5 examines the role of the teacher in organising the discussions. Chapter 6 examines the notion of gender and the diverse ways that the pupils and teachers oriented towards gender in the book club discussions. Chapter 7 treats the different ways in which both pupils and teachers related the texts to real life experiences; so called text-to-life references. The ana-

lyses problematize the intersection between fiction and pupils' everyday lives, as treated in book discussions.

The findings are finally summarised in a concluding chapter.¹

Note

1. The references for the chapters that constitute articles submitted/accepted in academic journals, i.e., Chapters 5–7, are listed after each chapter, while all references are found in a complete list of references at the end of the thesis.

2

CHILDREN'S LITERATURE AND READER RESPONSES

Social psychology, literary theory, literary criticism and the objects of that criticism are all involved with "sense-making".

(Potter, Wetherell, & Stringer, 1984, p. 1)

The present work is an interdisciplinary investigation, which combines theory on children's literature with discursive psychology, as it analyses *talk* about books, and not only reader responses or the books *per se*. The present study takes place in a school setting. Yet, at large, it does not involve pedagogical theory. When educational issues are analysed, it is from a *literary* or discursive perspective. How is literature exploited in this particular pedagogical context?

Discursive psychology

Theoretically, the focus on booktalk, that is, on dialogues, is congenial with a discursive turn in the social science and humanities (Billig *et al.*, 1988; Edwards, 1997; Edwards & Potter, 1992; Potter, 1996b). Since Aidan Chambers (1985/2000; 1991/1996; 1993/1999) stresses the importance of talk in teaching children to become readers, I have chosen to work with a methodology grounded in discursive psychology (see also Chapter 3).

Thus, the motives to use discursive psychology as a theoretical departure for the present thesis are partly epistemological and

partly methodological. According to discursive psychology, phenomena are only given meaning through discourse (cf. Edwards, 1997; Edwards & Potter, 1992; Potter, 1996b; Potter & Wetherell, 1987). Typically, discursive psychologists avoid ontological statements and formulate research questions from a social constructionist perspective (Potter, 1996b, p. 98). An epistemological base of discursive psychology and the present thesis is social constructionism as it was originally formulated by Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann (1966/1991), meaning, very briefly, that all social phenomena are created in and through social interaction.

The methodological motive concerns the definition of discourse as “talk and texts as parts of social practices” (Potter, 1996b, p. 105) – e.g. transcriptions of talk – which has proved useful for the study. Discursive psychology deals with everyday conversation, but also with, for instance, written news reports and scientific papers. Yet, the present definition of discourse is narrower than macro oriented approaches within the social sciences (e.g., Foucauldian models).

In line with his definition of discourse, Potter deliberately does not differentiate between talk and text. Accordingly, in the present work the data consist of children’s literature – i.e. texts – as well as written transcriptions of talk in interaction, which can be analysed in the same way as texts since they form a web of arguments and views in the same way as any “ordinary” text.

Research questions for which discursive psychology can be used with advantage, are, for instance, those having a dual focus on practices and on the resources that are drawn upon in the same practices (Potter, 1997). Such a resource perspective is congenial with the aim of the present thesis.

Theory on children’s literature

The present thesis takes place in a didactic setting, but since it does not have a didactic aim, pedagogical theory will not be discussed

here. However, some literary pedagogical works involve issues that are of interest for the present study, and will therefore be presented.

Relation to adult literature

Perry Nodelman (1985) argues that the essential difference between literature for adults and for children is that there is an apparent *sameness* in works of children's literature. According to Nodelman, this sameness involves conservatism, and a group of oppositional themes (e.g., freedom and constriction, home and exile, escape and acceptance). Nodelman's intention is not primarily to criticise children's literature. He claims that such sameness requires a new approach to interpretation, since traditional interpretation places a high value on uniqueness.

According to Zohar Shavit (1986), there is a discrepancy between child and adult readers, for example in the expectations concerning the texts and in the reading habits. Shavit calls texts that can be read by both children and adults, *ambivalent* texts. Ambivalent texts are "texts that synchronically (yet dynamically, not statically) maintain an ambivalent status in the literary polysystem" (Shavit, 1986, p. 66). Such texts belong simultaneously to more than one literary system and are therefore read in different ways by at least two different reader groups (in this case, children and adults) (Shavit, 1986, p. 66). In line with this reasoning, Shavit argues that ambivalent texts have two implicated readers: a pseudo-addressee and a real addressee. The author's primary intention is not that the child, who is only the official addressee, should understand everything in the text. The child is more an excuse for the text than its primary addressee (Shavit, 1986, p. 71). Shavit (1986, p.70) indicates that there is a lack of information about how children read literature and how their reading differs from that of adults.

Children's literature in the popular circuit

Pierre Bourdieu's (1998) reasoning on cultural fields and cultural capital can be applied to the study of children's literature (cf. Boëthius, 1996, pp. 16–17). Where on the literary field is children's literature placed? What cultural or symbolic capital is acquired from working with literature for children? According to Bourdieu (1979; 1998), the largest amount of symbolic capital is available in autonomic fields in which experts evaluate other experts. The field of children's literature is not autonomous. Outsiders, for example pedagogues and parents, constantly judge books for children; critique, as well as criticism, of children's literature is not undertaken by children, but by adults *for* them.

Drawing on the field of sociology of literature, it is possible to examine the significance of the placement of children's literature on specific bookshelves in stores and libraries (Boëthius, 1996, p. 12). Furthermore, the appearance – for example, cover and bulk – of children's books often differs from books for adults. In addition, children's literature is often sold at a lower price than literature for adults. Using Robert Escarpit's (1978) terminology, literature for children and young people constitutes a category of its own in the *popular circuit*. There are differences between writers for an adult vs. child audience in terms of how manuscripts and authors are treated. The publishers often edit manuscripts of children's books more than books for adults. Stefan Måhlqvist (1983) has shown how the Swedish translations of the Biggles books, in some cases, involved major cuts, mainly of politically incorrect parts, such as racial stereotypes. Inversely, some Swedish children's books that have been translated have undergone corresponding adaptations. The French Fifi Brindacier can, for example, only lift a pony, whereas the original Swedish Pippi Longstocking (Swed. Pippi Långstrump) manages to lift a horse (Westin, 1998, p. 131). Moreover, the authors of illustrated literature for children are paid less (Yrlid, 1994, p. 34). The percentage of the royalty decreases as the amount of illustrations increases. Moreover, literature for children and

youth is unfairly treated as regards reviews. Children's literature is not always placed among reviews of literature for adults, and there is a well-established custom to review several children's books in the same article. In Sweden, for example, the two major daily newspapers, *Svenska Dagbladet* and *Dagens Nyheter*, both practice this type of reviewing.

In Sweden, the status of children's literature has increased during the post-war period, with a *hausse* during the 1970s, but it is constantly lower than that of literature for adults. To give some examples; no author of literature for children and young people has as yet been awarded the Nobel Prize, and neither Tove Jansson nor Astrid Lindgren have had a chair in the Swedish Academy. After the death of Astrid Lindgren in March 2002, the Swedish government has decided to launch a yearly Astrid Lindgren prize of about 5 million Swedish Crowns. Yet, quite symptomatically, the prize will not be reserved for authors. Organisations can, in principle, also be awarded.

The childist perspective

Peter Hunt (1991) argues that children's literature should be studied from a *childist* perspective, that is, literature for children and young people must be seen from the perspective of children. The notion *childist criticism* shall be regarded in analogy with *feminist criticism*. According to Hunt, *childist criticism* means "reading as a child" (1991, pp. 191–192).

Is there really a need for a special branch of children's and young peoples' literature within the academic subject of literature? No, some researchers answer. It is possible to analyse literature for children and young people using the very same theories and methods as for literature at large. Boel Westin represents one example of this point of view. Westin (1993) has a way of viewing children's literature that is almost opposite to that of Hunt. In her doctoral thesis on the *Moomin* books by Tove Jansson, Westin

(1988) did not treat the texts as children's literature but submitted them to a traditional study of genre and theme.

Westin (1993) has also developed her standpoint in an article entitled "Mission Impossible – The dilemma of research on children's literature". The dilemma – the mission impossible of research on children's literature – is, according to Westin, that children's literature is written by adults but read by children and young people. Westin (1993, p. 22) claims that it is impossible for the researcher to read such books both as an adult and as a child. Overall, Westin believes that it is impossible to grasp the child reader's experience of the text. Yet, a Swedish example of children's reading is, for instance, Gunnlög Mäarak's (1994) thesis, which will be referred to below. Westin (1998) has later modified her statement, arguing that a special children's method and theory is not needed, however, as in any case of literary study, one should choose a method corresponding to the studied texts.

Could one not then just as well talk about a *mission impossible* of literary studies? The literary scholar – the researcher – cannot read fiction both as an "ordinary" reader and as a researcher. If the ultimate is impossible, one might settle for the *second best*, and study real readers' testimony with the gaze of a researcher.

Notwithstanding, the proper agenda of Westin is to release children's literature from the historical yoke of pedagogues. According to Westin (1993, p. 17), pedagogues have seen children's literature as some sort of didactic or normative utility. She argues that the artistry of a particular piece of work is not dependent on its audience (Westin, 1993, p. 22). Therefore, the analytical process must remain the same whether it is applied to children's literature or books for adults (Westin, 1993). Yet, literature for children and young people is distinct from other literature, since it is oriented to a specific age group, containing people who live in another situation than do adults.

Ghettoisation

In a somewhat related view, Maria Nikolajeva (1998) has criticised Hunt for *ghettoising* children's literature; she argues that Hunt isolates children's literature from general literary studies, and that Hunt is hostile towards theory *per se*. In her critique of Hunt for being anti-theoretical, Nikolajeva draws a somewhat surprising parallel to feminism, stating that it is also against theory. I believe that it is indeed possible to see both Hunt's childist argument and certainly literary feminism (for an introduction see, for example, M. Eagleton, 1997), as dismissals of *former* theories. In contrast to Nikolajeva, I claim that both childism and feminism move beyond that dismissal, and therefore are *theory generating* rather than theory antagonistic.

In her writing, Nikolajeva seems to dismiss attempts to reach insights about children's and young people's understanding of literature through children (1998, p. 19). In fact, Nikolajeva distrusts children's capability to verbalise literary experiences.¹ She is not alone in her distrust of children's ability to articulate their responses to literature. In his psychological study of children's literature, Nicholas Tucker (1981/1991, p. 2) claims that children are too elusive and respond in ways that are too laconic.

Torben Weinreich has described the situation in the field of children's literature as having passed from *imposed* ghettoisation to *voluntary* ghettoisation (2000, p. 23). At first, children's literature was marginalized from the literary establishment; later this has led to a proud separatist self-exclusion.

Children's literature as an imperialistic activity

Drawing on Edward Said's work on orientalism, Nodelman (1992) convincingly argues that children's literature as well as child psychology are, in many ways, imperialist activities. In the same way that Occidentals relates to Orientals, adults relate to children, seeing them as the *Other*, for example, inferior, female, sensitive. Since one aspect of the orientalism of children's literature is adults

seeing and speaking for children, Hunt's childist approach is criticised by Nodelman. According to Nodelman, the solution to the situation is instead to accept it and, most importantly, to keep it in mind, while proceeding to formulate a modern criticism of children's literature.

Research on children and literature in Sweden

Research on literature for children and youth became an independent branch in Sweden in the 1960s (Kåreland, 1987). The interest in children's literature then increased in the 1970s due to the boom in publication of children's literature during the post-war period (S. Svensson, 1987, pp. 22–29). One background factor was that children's literature of the 1940s had had an impact on adult readers as well. The aesthetic climate in the early 1960s also shaped an increased interest in children's literature. The left-wing wave in the late 1960s put marginalized literary genres like labour literature and children's literature on the agenda. Simultaneously, literary theorists started to turn away from the *New Criticism*, and its focus on text critique (Bergsten, 1998, p. 11). Instead, literature was seen as a social phenomenon (Svedjedal, 1998, p. 77). Therefore, the readers, for example children and young people, became a point of focus in their own right.

Originally, the domain of children's literature had been reserved for pedagogues. In fact, the very first Swedish PhD thesis on this subject was presented at a Department of Education. It was Klingberg's (1964) historical work on Swedish literature for children and young people 1591–1839. Until that point, the area was even despised by literary scholars. Around the same time – in 1965 – the Swedish Institute for Children's Books was founded (Svenska barnboksinstitutet [The Swedish Institute for Children's Books] & Statens kulturråd [The Swedish National Council for Cultural Affairs], 1987, p. 81). Moreover, undergraduate courses in literature for children and youth have been offered at Swedish university departments of literature from 1970 onwards.

Several doctoral dissertations in Literature on texts for children and young people were presented in 1977; at Uppsala University by Lena Kåreland (1977) and Stefan Mählqvist (1977), and at Lund University by Gudrun Fagerström (1977). Kåreland studied one important Swedish critic of children's literature, Gurli Linder. Kåreland's thesis also presents the development of Swedish criticism of children's literature. In terms of time period, Mählqvist's thesis more or less continues where Klingberg stopped; Mählqvist undertook a quantitative analysis of children's literature in Sweden, covering the period 1870–1950. In his thesis, Mählqvist used a cross-sectional model to get a grip on the extensive text material. Fagerström's thesis on the well-known Swedish author of children's books Maria Gripe was a pioneering work in two senses, since it also included a reader survey. In 1982, Stockholm University inaugurated Sweden's first chair in Literature for children and young people, and Vivi Edström was appointed as professor (Boëthius, 1994, p. 44).

Also in Germany, England and the U.S. the interest in children's literature expanded during the 1960s (Boëthius, 1994, p. 43).

From text to reader

Since the theoretical background to the present study is close to the work of Stanley Fish (1980/1998) and Jonathan Culler (1980), it can also be related to studies of reader-response criticism (see further Suleiman & Crosman, 1980; Tompkins, 1980).

This review focuses on studies that are relevant to the present thesis, e.g. work drawing on a constructionist perspective, such as studies of individual readers and reading, and work on *interpretive communities*, that is, groups that co-construct their readings. First, a bit of the background to such studies on reading will also be presented.

The modern study of literature can roughly be divided into three periods:

- A focus on the *author* (Romanticism, 19th century)
- An exclusive interest in the *text* (New Criticism)
- A radical shift towards attention to the *reader* over recent years (T. Eagleton, 1996, p. 64)

This reader focus in fact started as early as in the 1930s with the work of D. W. Harding, “The Role of the Onlooker” (1937), and that of Louise M. Rosenblatt, *Literature as Exploration* (1938/1970). However, their theorising on readers and reading did not have any large impact until the 1960s, when it appeared under the reader-response criticism banner (Benton, 1996, p. 72).

The basic assumption of all reader-oriented research is that the reader is a co-creator of the text. This can be studied in a wide range of manners: from studying the rhetoric and the “reader” *in* the text (using, for example, Wolfgang Iser’s theories or studying a text’s impact on authentic readers as in Norman N. Holland’s work, see below).

The two main research approaches that focus on the reader are *reader-response criticism* and *reception theory*. Iser distinguishes reception from response in that “A theory of response has its roots in the text; a theory of reception arises from a history of readers’ judgements” (1978a, p. x). In 1980, two collections of texts on reader-response criticism were published: *Reader-Response Criticism: From Formalism to Post-Structuralism* (1980) by Jane Tompkins and *The Reader in the Text: Essays on Audience and Interpretation* (1980) by Susan R. Suleiman and Inge Crosman. Four authors appear in both books: Culler, Holland, Iser and Gerald Prince. Suleiman, interestingly enough, entitles her introduction “Varieties of Audience-Oriented Criticism”; it is mentioned that the categories of Crosman’s bibliography are adopted from *reader-response* criticism. Otherwise that terminology is not used.

It would have been interesting if Tompkins had discussed more thoroughly the relation between reader-response criticism and reception theory in her introduction. Especially since the works of, for example, Iser are drawn upon in both groupings. As it was,

only Hans Robert Jauß was mentioned in a footnote as a representative of reception aesthetics.

Etymologically, *reception* derives from the Latin, *receptiō*, which means the act of receiving (Onions, 1966, p. 745). Reception theory has been thoroughly presented by Robert C. Holub in *Reception Theory: A critical introduction* (1984). The purpose of Holub's book was to introduce German reception theory to a non-German-speaking audience (1984, p. xiv). Holub began by sorting out the boundaries between the two approaches; the connection is that they share an involvement in the general shift from author and work to text and reader. The major divergence, according to Holub, is that reception theory started as a collective undertaking, while reader-response criticism constitutes a more loosely connected group, a catchall term for a group of separate theories (Holub, 1984, p. xii). In this regard, it is not so surprising that some theorists, for example, Iser, appear in both reception theory and in reader-response criticism.

Besides Iser, Jauß is one of the major theorists in reception theory. Jauß has had an impact on literary theory through his formulation of a history of readers' reactions to literature, focusing on the general reception of literature during a certain epoch. According to Holub, Jauß' interest in reception derived from his attention to the connection between literature and history. Another of Jauß' important contributions to literary theory is the notion of *horizon of expectation* (1982, p. 22). The reader has expectations of the book and reads the book through these expectations; the reader will be satisfied if these expectations, or some of them, are fulfilled. Also, the thoughts and ideas that are presented to the reader in the book can change the readers' horizon of expectation. Masterpieces have had the power to change ingrained patterns. These "classical" masterpieces, which form parts of the literary canon, will continue to be relevant, and they will influence generation after generation. Each generation interprets them anew based on their experiences. Methodologically, the distinct recep-

tions of different historical generations are studied through critics, reviews, diaries, cultural articles and so on. One can also come across the notion *Rezeptionsästhetik* (Ger.; Eng. reception of aesthetic) for this branch of reception studies.

An overview of reader-response criticism, equivalent to Holub's work on reception theory, is Elizabeth Freund's *The Return of the Reader* (1987). Freund's account is focused on I. A. Richards (a founding figure), Culler, Fish, Holland and Iser. With respect to the difference between reception theory and reader-response criticism, Freund followed Iser's distinction (see above).

Apart from the above-mentioned books that deal with adult readers, there are two informative articles on children's reader responses: "Research in Response to Literature" by Lee Galda (1983) and "Reader-Response Criticism" by Michael Benton (1996). In her paper, Galda discussed theory and research – in terms of text and context – and concluded with a methodological discussion, all in relation to reader responses to literature. She did not take a stance in relation to the label issue, but with her focus on responses, I would place her in the reader-response criticism camp.

Benton (1996) points at what he sees as a fusion between the academic writing on *reading* and that of *teaching literature*. According to Benton, the focus on reading as well as on teaching literature has shifted back and forth from an educational focus in the 1960s and 1980s, to a more reader-response focus in the 1970s.

I do agree on the ever-appearing connection between children and education. However, I find the pendulum movement between a focus on theories on reading and theories on teaching literature as rather logical, as the writing on teaching can, in a way, be seen as an application of theory.

Time has put reader-response criticism in the foreground, with an emphasis on empirical investigations and psychological developmental studies of applied issues, such as what a child should/could read at what age. The terminology, however, is not completely consistent, and there is a broad range of notions such as

reader-response orientation (Benton, 1996, p. 72), *reader-oriented theory* (cf. Appleyard, 1990, pp. 4–9; Culler, 1997, p. 123), *reader-oriented perspective* (Iser, 1978a, p. 20) or *reader-response theory* (Cuddon, 1998/1999, p. 726); catchall or partly overlapping terms that would in some cases even comprise both reception theory and reader-response criticism.

Apart from these theoretical discussions, some empirical reception research has been conducted, mainly through “staged” situations (cf. Benton, 1996) but also through ethnographic studies of literature in school (cf. Hickman, 1981).

This review does not attempt to be exhaustive. The ambition is merely to indicate the main lines that research on reader response has taken in relation to children’s literature. Both texts that focus reader response in general and texts that focus children’s response to literature in particular will be presented in the following brief review.

The reader in the text

The title of this section of my presentation is borrowed from the book by Suleiman and Crosman (1980), who in turn drew on a paper by Chambers (1977).

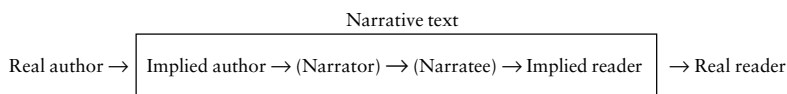
As mentioned above, the reader can be studied from various perspectives: one example is *in* the text. (This corresponds roughly with what Holub calls the communication model (1984, p. 107).) Iser (1971) developed Roman Ingarden’s (1960) notion of *unbestimmtheitsstellen* (Ger.; Eng. uncertain places), into *blanks* or *gaps of indeterminacy*. Where Ingarden claims that every indeterminate place has one “correct” solution where the reader may fill in the author’s intention, Iser underlines the interaction between the reader’s imagination and the blanks of the text. In this way, the readers create their own texts through their interpretations of the gaps.

In his influential book *The Implied Reader* (Ger. *Der Implizite Leser* 1972; 1978b), Iser also introduced the term *the implied reader* – analogous to Wayne C. Booth’s *implied author* (1961/1970). The implied reader is the one for whom the writer writes; this is however not necessarily a conscious act of the author. Historically, literature was in general commissioned work; the reader was thus known. The modern author may write with a specific person or audience in mind, or for nobody in particular. One can still “hear” the author’s voice whether or not there is a narrator in the text.

In an award winning paper, Chambers (1977) advanced the idea of using the notion of an implied reader to determine the ever-appearing question of whether a book can be for children (1977, p. 78).

Chambers also uses the notion of gaps – though he calls them *tell-tale* gaps (1985/2000, p. 46) – along with narratological terms such as *point of view* (cf. Chatman, 1978/1993). Chambers had a point in that children, being younger, are generally less used to giving themselves up to the book while reading, but it is a bit problematic that he did not account for his assumptions about child readers, as opposed to adult readers, in his paper. Empirical research might shed light on Chambers’ claim that children differ from adults in that children to a lesser degree give themselves up to the book.

Another way of studying the reader in the text is to examine the *addressee* (Wall, 1991). Barbara Wall argues that special forms of *address* distinguish literature for children and young people from literature for adults. Wall uses Seymour Chatman’s diagram to illustrate narrative communication (Chatman, 1978/1993, p. 151; Wall, 1991, p. 4)



The two physical entities – *real author* and *real reader* – paradoxically never communicate directly. They only know each other as implied. In the text, only the *narrator* and the *narratee* communicate with each other. The narrator articulates the wishes of an *implied author* (Wall, 1991, pp. 6–8). What is significant in children’s literature is, according to Wall, not what is said but “the way it is said, and to whom it is said” (1991, p. 2). She distinguishes three types of addresses in children’s literature: (i) *dual address* – when the child and the adult reader are addressed simultaneously, (ii) *double address* – where the child and the adult reader are addressed alternately, and (iii) *single address* – when only a child reader is addressed (Wall, 1991, pp. 35–36).

A dual, or a *simultaneous* type of address is oriented to a child reader at the same time as an adult reader is satisfied. Such dual address is both difficult and unusual. Wall has, however, detected some examples from different epochs: T. H. White (*The Sword in the Stone* and *The Queen of Air and Darkness*) and Lewis Carroll’s books about Alice.

When a double address is used, the narrator orients towards a child addressee, but *alternate* it with addressing an adult audience. This can either occur openly as a consequence of a shift in attention from the implicit author, or in concealment, when the narrator consciously exploits the implicit child reader’s ignorance and entertains the adult reader with jokes that are funny just because children do not understand them. Wall sees this type of address as a 19th-century phenomenon. J. M. Barrie (*Peter Pan*) and C. S. Lewis (the Narnia books) are examples of writers using double address. A Swedish example can be found in some passages of Astrid Lindgren’s books about Emil (cf. Boëthius, 1998).

Characteristic of single address is that the narrator addresses the *child narratee* apparently unperturbed by the fact that also adults can read the text. According to Wall, this address is a 20th century phenomenon. At the turn of the century, in year 1900, the

attitude towards adults writing for children changed in that children's literature became a legitimate area.

Wall notes that numerous classics among children's books appeal strongly to adult readers. Her interpretation of this is that the classics invoke childhood nostalgia, which, obviously, is something that children cannot sense.

Umberto Eco also treats the addressee in his work. Eco claims that the author is obliged to construe a model of the possible reader. Eco (1981, p. 7) calls such possible reader a Model Reader (cf. Iser's notion the implied reader). Texts in which the author tries to predict the response of a special group of readers, such as children, Eco calls *closed* texts (1981, p. 8). Paradoxically, nothing is more open than a closed text, argues Eco (1985, p. 74). However, this openness has its origin in how the reader *uses* the text, not in the text itself. Contrarily, the openness of *open* texts is located in the possibility of interpretation. Open texts are addressed to any *type* of reader; the Model Reader for open texts is constructed drawing on linguistic difficulty, possible interpretations etceteras (Eco, 1985, p. 75).

Literary contracts

Culler's (1997, pp. 62–63) notion of *literary competence* focuses on the knowledge or previous experiences the reader brings to the reading situation. A more detailed explanation can be found in Culler (1980, pp. 113–130). Different components of literary competence have been studied in various ways. Below, some examples will be presented, from studies of very young children's initial literary interactions to 18-year-olds literary presumptions.

One of the first literary competencies one must acquire during the very first interactions with books is to restrain oneself from trying to eat the book. Catherine E. Snow and Anat Ninio (1986, p. 119) identified seven *contracts of literacy* in parent-toddler picture book reading interactions. Snow and Ninio developed the concept

of contracts of literacy after a reanalysis of parts of their former research on parent-child interaction among Western middle-class families where most children were initiated into the literary world at an early age. The contracts are: (i) books are for reading, not for manipulating, e.g. eating; (ii) in book reading, the book is in control: the reader is led; (iii) pictures are not things but representations of things; (iv) pictures are for naming; (v) pictures, though static, can represent events; (vi) book events occur outside real time; (vii) books constitute an autonomous fictional world. The parent's scaffolding of these rules is essential, since reading a book alone is the same as communicating with an object. This can certainly be a high-quality communication – once you have learned to make meaning of it.

As a child develops, it will normally come in contact with institutionalised story reading. In a study of such a literary interaction, Readiness for Reading is used in a way corresponding to literary contracts. During a period of 18 months, Marilyn Cochran-Smith (1984/1994) did field work at an American nursery school. Her interest was what later became the title of her monograph: *The Making of a Reader*. Her findings show that, in this nursery school context, the adults transformed the children into readers long before they could recognize text or write. The children thus learned to use and understand written text before they had been taught to code and decode text. This was done through socialisation in terms of literary events, not by direct teaching (Cochran-Smith, 1984/1994, p. 2). Cochran-Smith uses the concept “literacy event” in analogue to Shirley Brice Heath (1983/1991, p. 386): “occasions in which the talk revolves around a piece of writing”. The sheer amount of literacy events in this specific setting is one cause behind socialisation into literacy. The environment was impregnated with texts and text-based activities.

One such type of literacy event is *story reading*. In her analysis of 100 story reading events, Cochran-Smith (1984/1994, p. 169) distinguishes between three types of interaction: Readiness for

Reading, Life-to-Text and Text-to-Life. Readiness concerns appropriate behaviour for story reading, such as sitting down and listening quietly. Readiness interactions occurred before and at the beginning of story reading. Most of the interactions during the story reading were spent on helping the listeners to understand the particular texts: what Cochran-Smith calls Life-to-Text interactions. “[W]ithin Life-to-Text sequences, the storyreader 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 – normally the well-known everyday life – in order to understand literature. Finally, in Text-to-Life interactions, the aim is to learn how to use literature for understanding life (Cochran-Smith, 1984/1994, pp. 169–173).

Cochran-Smith noticed that a great deal of time during story reading was devoted to helping the children understand the meaning that a literary message, theme, or information could have in their lives. As an opposed parallel to Life-to-Text interactions: “Textual references were used to throw light on extra-textual matters.” (Cochran-Smith, 1984/1994, p. 173) (See also Chapter 7.)

Fish (1980/1998) stresses that communication, for example interpretation of fiction, takes place in a specific context. A consequence of being in a specific context is that one is embraced by a structure of assumptions concerning the goals and aims of the present situation. All utterances will immediately be understood from these assumptions. These assumptions can be compared with literary contracts.

One example of this is that the reader tends to ascribe more importance to every single word and to interpret a deeper meaning when reading a text that has the typographical shape of a poem than if the very same text is presented as prose. Cai Svensson (1985) has shown that 18-year-olds are more inclined than 11- and 14-year-olds to make this type of interpretation.

Interpretive community

Fish (1970; 1980/1998) has been a very important foreground figure in promoting reader-response perspectives and social constructionism. Fish (1980/1998) coined the notion of *interpretive community* to signify those who share interpretative strategies. In his theories, he primarily stresses the interpretive *situation*; that is, the context in which the interpretation occurs.

Below, others who have espoused a similar line of thinking as Fish – that is, that the local community can be of significance when interpreting literature – will be presented. When analysing children's literature, the concept of reading ages, or stages in a Piagetian sense, has been important. One could say that some of these works apply – without using that very term – related notions of interpretive communities, in the sense that, for example, children of a certain age share a similar life situation and are therefore also assumed to share interpretative strategies.

Age (stage) and reading

André Favat had three aims with his study *Child and Tale: The Origins of Interest* (1977). These were to (i) examine children's interest in tales; (ii) identify when the reader's interest best corresponds to the story; and (iii) analyse the sources that lead towards common characteristics between the reader and the tale. In his analyses, Favat drew on Jean Piaget's theory on children's development. Classical tales, written by Perrault, the Grimm brothers and H. C. Andersen, are discussed in his analysis of tales for children. Applying early Piagetian notions of children's thinking, Favat arrived at the conclusion that children younger than 8 years of age like fairy tales because they correspond to children's conception of the world at that age; e.g. *magical* and *animist* beliefs as well as *cognitive egocentrism*. Yet, besides his own experience of children's reading, Favat did not draw on empirical work on children's reading.

Appleyard (1990) has similarly written about the development of the reader, drawing on developmental psychology and other accounts of children's reading. Following the maturation of the individual, Appleyard identified five reader roles; (i) early childhood: the reader as player; (ii) later childhood: the reader as hero and heroine; (iii) adolescence: the reader as thinker; (iv) college and beyond: the reader as interpreter; (v) adulthood: the pragmatic reader. In the present review, the second and third stages are of most interest, considering the ages of the children participating in the present study, that is, children of 10–14 years. Appleyard means that since most literature for school-aged children has an archetypal powerful or clever heroine or hero as principal character, “the distinctive role readers take at this stage is to imagine themselves as heroes and heroines of romances that are unconscious analogues of their own lives” (Appleyard, 1990, pp. 59–60). This is developed by Appleyard (1990, p. 77) as “fictional characters represent what children at this age [school-age, my comment] want to be; they are the fantasized embodiments of the unambiguous virtue, skill, popularity, and adult approval that will resolve confusion about identity”. Appleyard means that young readers seem to look for representations of qualities they themselves desire. Taking the role of The Reader as Thinker, Appleyard (1990, p. 14) claims that “[t]he adolescent reader looks to stories to discover insights into the meaning of life, values and beliefs worthy of commitment, ideal images, and authentic role models for imitation”.

Tucker (1981/1991, p. 4) drew on a Piagetian tradition in his study of the accommodation of children's literature to children of different ages. Tucker divided children's book into four age-based stages: (i) first books (ages 0–3); (ii) story and picture books (ages 3–7); (iii) early fiction (ages 7–11) and (iv) literature for older children (ages 11–14). In contrast, fairy stories, myths and legends were seen as “ageless”. His analyses are interesting *per se*, and it can therefore be experienced as a bit provocative that Tucker dis-

missed children's own responses and only drew on *his own* thoughts about children's possible responses.

In Sweden, two major works on children and reading were published in 1994. Gunnlög Mäarak (1994) has shown that children as young as 6–8 years are capable of creating meaning out of complex literary texts. Her thesis consists of two studies. In one study, 40 children aged 6 and 8 from middle-class or working class backgrounds heard a short story written by Tove Jansson read aloud. Afterwards, they were to retell the story for a comrade. Thereafter, the children discussed the characters' feelings during the plot. In a second study, 70 pre-school children and grade 2 pupils heard a chapter of *Winnie-the-Pooh* by A. A. Milne read aloud. Questions were asked during and after the reading.

Mäarak found that even the youngest children were, at large, capable of taking the perspective of more than one fictional character at a time. A majority of the children also expressed understanding of irony. The metaphors were solved by 95 percent of the children hearing the short story by Tove Jansson, and by 61 percent of the school children and 46 percent of the pre-school children hearing the chapter from *Winnie-the-Pooh*. The children's retelling of the story revealed that they often had their own understanding of the coherence of the plots. For example, they invented "happy endings" where there were none, and they introduced moral points of their own in the stories. Also, both age and class had an impact on the distance between the child's interpretation of the text and the literary norm. Among the older children and the middle class children, the children's interpretations were the closest to the literary norm.

Through questionnaires and interviews with children aged 9–12, Kristian Wåhlin and Maj Asplund Carlsson (1994) identified three main sources for children's book supply: (i) home, (ii) friends and (iii) school or public libraries. Wåhlin and Asplund Carlsson's work derived from a study called "Rubber-Tarzan in the library. Why are some books so popular?". In their conclusion, Wåhlin

and Asplund Carlsson, discusses how an ideal library – an institution where the needs of small-scale readers as well as bookworms would be satisfied – should be organised. Their proposition is a library in three sections: a book café for reading, a book shop for new and second hand books, and finally a public library.

Asplund Carlsson's (1998) thesis consists of no less than 13 studies derived from four separate projects: (1) Phenomenographic studies of "Before the law" by Franz Kafka; 2) Schoolchildren's (aged 8–20) understandings of the tale *The Giving Tree*; 3) *Gummi-Tarzan* and readers in grades 3–6 (see also Wåhlin and Asplund Carlsson above); and 4) Children, narratives and books in pre-school. The focus in these studies was children's response in relation to structure, character and meaning in narratives.

Asplund Carlsson distinguishes three ways of relating to meaning in narrative. One, that she calls allegoric, is where the author wants to transmit, or the reader can understand, a message in the text. A second, called ironic, is where the reader grasps contradictions between what the authors want to say and what is in the text. Last, the third and the critical one is where the reader is critical of the whole process of interpreting.

Class

In her field work 1969–1978 in two American countryside towns, Heath (1983/1991) studied how children in different environments acquired a language. Her study is unique in its detailed analysis of how varied language acquisition can be; middle-class children were, in many ways, better equipped to succeed within a school system based on middle-class values.

According to Heath (1982), this initiation into a literate society starts early. Parents in mainstream communities encourage their children to read and interpret their environment by identification of objects in, for example, picture books.

Gender

In a study of female romance readers, *Reading the romance*, Janice Radway (1984/1991) interviewed one bookshop salesclerk and 16 of her regular customers. Additionally, Radway collected a questionnaire from 42 additional customers.

The romance readers that participated in Radway's (1984/1991, p. 109) study expressed the view that a good book should have a cover that depicts the characters with the right hair colour, showing that the artist has actually read the book. In their judgement of a book's realism, the romance readers separated plot from setting (Radway, 1984/1991, p. 109). Therefore they embraced the following ambivalence: the setting should be "factually correct", yet the lives of the people in the book should be happier and more exciting than those of the readers. (See also Chapter 7 below.)

Another study where gender can be seen as an interpretive community, in a transferred sense, is Gemma Moss' chapter in David Buckingham's *Reading Audiences: Young people and the media* (1993). In an innovative study, Moss focused the reading histories behind young girls' interest in the romance genre. The romances spoke differently to the four girls who participated in the study. Moss concluded that romances should be understood in relation to social practices. A bit surprising, though, is her omission of reference to Radway's study (see above), even though Moss studied teenagers.

The data of Johan Elmfeldt's (1997) thesis were collected from his own teaching of literature in a high school in Sweden. A significant part of the analysis concerns reflection on Elmfeldt's own pedagogical practices as a teacher. The texts that the pupils read and discuss were classics, and they had not themselves chosen to read exactly these texts (Elmfeldt, 1997). In his result section, Elmfeldt discusses his insights about the "pupil's text" and the "teacher's text"; his observations of opposing gender positions in the classroom; the lack of historical change in the literature

discussions; and finally, his view on the conflict between the traditional educational setting and experience-oriented reading.

A series of studies have concerned gender and young children's reading. Yet, all these studies have been arranged by the researchers themselves, from the selection of books to the discussing and interviewing (Arizpe, 2001; Davies, 1989b; Davies & Banks, 1992; Wing, 1997, see also Chapter 6 in the present thesis).

The individual reader: The reader's mind

Holland presented a sort of case study of reader response in his book on *5 Readers Reading* (1975). He had the intention to undertake a study with questionnaires and group experiments, but discovered that "each reader must give the words meaning, and he [sic!] can only give them the meanings they have for him" (Holland, 1975, p. 43) and therefore decided to instead work informally with five readers; one female and four male college students interested in literature. Holland met weekly with the students, one at a time, for about one hour, discussing a previously decided story. The meetings were tape-recorded. The discussed stories treated in his book are William Faulkner's "A Rose for Emily", F. Scott Fitzgerald's "Winter Dreams" and Ernest Hemingway's "The Battler". Holland's description of his own acting during the meetings is suggestive of analysts' behaviours during therapeutic sessions; initiating responses with the phrase "How do you feel about...", avoiding displaying shock or annoyance towards the students' responses, eliciting free associations. Holland chose to transcribe the meetings excluding false starts, "filler phrases" and similar expressions. His conversational approach corresponds to the content focus of his study. In Chapters 5–7 of the present thesis, transcripts of conversations from meetings around books will be presented in a more detailed way, since the present study also foregrounds the *presentation* of the content.

Holland claims that “we draw upon the treasury a literary work provides to re-create our own characteristic psychological process” (1975, p. 247). This principle, he argues, explains both why different people have the same experience of, for example, a novel and why still other people’s experiences of the very same novel differ. According to Holland, the sameness derives from the resources that are used to create the experience. While the differences mirror individual differences (Holland, 1975, pp. 247–248).

David Bleich (1981) similarly stresses the subjectivity of response. He even launches the notion of subjective criticism:

Subjective criticism proposes that when the object of attention is symbolic, the attempt to explain that object is necessarily a subjective (and intersubjective) reconstruction of our own perceptions of the object. To construct a literary meaning is to explain a spontaneous perception and the means of understanding it in the same act. (Bleich, 1981, p. 237)

In fact, Holland (1975) compares his own work to that of Bleich and claims that the difference between them resides in Holland’s use of modern identity theory and that his own work can be applied to areas other than literature. Bleich (1981, p. 294) extends his subjective criticism to the areas of language and literature.

Donald Fry (1990) has presented case studies of six readers, four girls and two boys aged 8, 12 and 15 years. His study included his own recordings of several conversations with each of the participating children during one school year. Fry devotes a chapter to each child; furthermore, in each chapter, a common issue of children and reading is discussed. The topics are: (i) re-readings; (ii) the move from information books to fiction; (iii) Enid Blyton’s attraction to young readers; (iv) enjoyment of stories vs. academic reading; (v) reading of horror stories and enjoyment of films; (vi) a move from children’s books to adult books. Also, Fry discusses how the children see themselves as readers.

Problem formulation

In everyday life, we do not talk about books in the same way as we talk about for example movies: outside organised settings, we seldom read the same book simultaneously as someone else. In a school setting, however, that is, in our most important cultural institution for children, literature is often discussed as a part of normal everyday routines. Yet, as shown in my brief review above, there is a lack of work on children's authentic conversations about books.

In a non-problematized way, many earlier studies of children's reader responses have mainly involved adult perspectives and values, for example, in mapping what children do or do not understand. In Nodelman's (1992) terminology, this can be seen as an adult colonisation of children's literature. Therefore an overarching goal of the present study has been to try to find out what significance literature might have to the children themselves.

More specifically, the present investigation tries to explore literature as an entry into important issues for children in thinking about their own lives. In particular I will describe reader responses taking place in a school context. In so doing, I will analyse the various resources that children exploit in interpreting literature in booktalk. These resources will be studied as they are displayed conversationally in authentic group sessions.

Another aim is therefore, to describe booktalk as a meeting point between children and literature in an everyday school setting. In line with discursive psychology, I will both describe booktalk as a conversational genre and the type of interests, dilemmas and paradoxes that may be involved, in such practices in an everyday setting.

Note

1. “Om han [Hunt] vore konsekvent borde han helt överlåta studier av barnlitteratur till skolelever, vilkas begreppsapparat tyvärr aldrig går mycket längre än till ‘Det var en bra bok’. Inom parentes sagt: inte därför att barnen saknar förmåga att ta till sig boken, utan därför att de inte kan verbalisera sina upplevelser. Inte heller alla vuxna kan det.” [“Had he [Hunt] been consistent, he should have delegated studies of children’s literature to school children, whose conceptual repertoire unfortunately never stretches much farther than ‘It was a good book’. Incidentally, this is not because children lack the ability to understand the book, but because they cannot verbalise their experiences. Nor can all adults.”] (Nikolajeva, 1998, p. 19)

3

SETTING AND METHOD

'Well,' said Owl, 'the customary procedure in such cases is as follows.'
'What does Crustimoney Proseedcake mean?' said Pooh. *'For I am a*
Bear with Very Little Brain, and long words Bother me.' *'It means the*
Thing to Do.'
(Milne, 1926/1991, p. 45)

Setting

The primary focus of this study is children's encounter with literature in a natural setting. A natural setting refers to a context that is natural as opposed to staged – natural in the sense that “it has not been got up by the researcher” (Potter, 1996a, p. 135). The researcher has not created the conversational practice, that is, the conversation would occur whether it was being studied or not. (See also On “natural” data.) In the present investigation, the booktalk practices were authentic activities, initiated by the school and occurring in the school premises.

The school

My search for a natural setting led to a municipal elementary school – here called the Valley School – that has worked with reading support at all levels for ten years. I got to know about the school through The National Council for Cultural Affairs' list of reading projects. I first contacted the teacher-librarian at the school in June 1998. In August, I received permission to collect the

data for the study there. Eight groups, two from each grade (grades 4–7) agreed to participate. The Valley School is located in a district outside one of the ten largest cities in Sweden. The first time I visited the school, it was a misty autumn day. After a 15 minutes' bus-ride from the city centre, the school emerged out of the fog, as I walked from the bus stop over a quagmire. I easily found the library, at the heart of a small one-storey building. The library was stored in one room. My first impression was of a vivid ambience in the library, with several pupils visiting: asking the librarian, searching the bookshelves, reading, discussing books with each other. Later, I would learn that this was quite usual at the school. The pupils also participated in the library council, and they took turns working in the library: handing out books using the computer, and doing other small tasks. The library was thus a concern for both the pupils and the librarian and school direction.

Like most Swedish schools, the school studied is municipal; it is not an independent school (Swed. *fristående skola*). The school started in 1988, and the book clubs were initiated immediately, though they have developed over the years. The teachers, the librarian and others consider the different reading projects of the school valuable; the school library has, for example, been awarded by The Swedish Authors' fund. The school has established a work plan for activities in the library (*Förslag 980608 Arbetsplan för biblioteksverksamhet* [Proposal 08/06/98 Work plan for library activities] Appendix A). The work plan document is very close to the official compulsory school syllabus for the subject Swedish (Skolverket [National Agency for Education], 1996, pp. 75–79). In both documents, it is declared that the most important task for the school is to create good opportunities for the language development of the pupils: “Det är [...] skolans viktigaste uppgift att skapa goda möjligheter för elevernas språkutveckling” [It is the school's most important mission to create good opportunities for pupils' language development] (Skolverket [National Agency for Education], 1996, p. 75) and “Skolans viktigaste uppgift är att skapa

goda möjligheter för elevernas språkutveckling” [The school’s most important mission is to create good opportunities for pupils’ language development] (*Förslag 980608 Arbetsplan för biblioteksverksamhet* [Proposal 08/06/98 Work plan for library activities] Appendix A). It is also stated that language is a road to knowledge, and that it is of fundamental importance for learning. Therefore, the studied school declares that it prioritises keeping the school library well equipped.

According to the work plan (Appendix A), the school studied has four goals for the nursery school and for grades 1–7; three of them correspond to three of the syllabus’ eighteen goals for the subject Swedish (Skolverket [National Agency for Education], 1996). The fourth goal corresponds with one part of the general introduction to the Swedish language syllabus.

Participants

Pupils

At the time of the study, the total number of pupils at the school was about 250. In all, 40 pupils, 20 girls and 20 boys, participated in the book clubs studied. As indicated, the pupils were not selected to participate by the researcher. After asking which teachers were willing to participate, the teacher-librarian selected the groups asked to join the study. Once the groups were selected, the teachers enclosed an information letter about the study with the usual information to the parents about the book club activity; this was sent home with the children that would participate in the study. In my letter, I asked for consent from the children, and their parents, in the groups that would participate in the study (see Appendix B). No child chose not to participate.

Pedagogues

The five pedagogues involved (four female and one male) had all practised leading book clubs several times before the present book

club events. Four of them were class teachers, and the fifth was the teacher-librarian of the school, with a background as a class teacher and continued training as literary pedagogue.¹

Chamber's booktalk method

The book clubs were primarily inspired by Aidan Chambers' (1985/2000; 1991/1996; 1993/1999) and his *booktalk* approach. Chambers is an author of children's books and a former literature teacher who has published several works about how to get children to verbalise their literary experiences. In 1985, Chambers coined the term *booktalk* for talk about reading in reader-response contexts (Chambers, 1985/2000). Chambers warns the reader about "[e]xclusively repetitious reading of one kind of book, of any one writer" (1993/1999, p. 13). He argues that a person who reads in this way becomes simpleminded. To avoid repetitious reading, the enabling adult should help children to read with variation. According to Chambers (1993/1999, pp. 12–14), the method for accomplishing this makes it possible to listen to what others say about books and to speak your mind about books.

To Chambers (1993/1999), talk about books is an essential part of reading. He describes the reading process as a Reading Circle: Chambers calls the first sequence the Selection of books, the second sequence the "Reading"-time and the third the Response.² After the Response follows a new Selection, and so forth. Chambers stresses the importance of an *enabling adult* to support the child at every phase in the circle. Thus, his view is that children need adults. Chambers (1991/1996, p. 15) claims that an experienced guide is the best company for learning readers, yet he acknowledges that learners learn from one another and that enablers do, in fact, learn from their novices.

According to Chambers, the Selection sequence includes book stock, availability, accessibility and presentation. In a school, this concerns questions like variety of purchase, opening hours of the

school library or distance to a local library, and how the books are stored on the shelves. This sequence is only meaningful if time is set aside for *reading* what has been selected. Chambers claims that the “Reading” sequence involves both reading to yourself and hearing an enabling adult read aloud in a pleasurable way. The final sequence – the Response – contains the essential point in Chambers’ ideas: the importance of *talk* about reading. The present school works under a device by an 8-year-old girl rendered by Chambers: “We don’t know what we think about a book until we’ve talked about it.” (1993/1999, p. 15). This is, in a way, the motto for Chambers’ approach to improving how we teach children to become (literary) readers. In the Response sequence, the enabling adult should avoid asking the child *why* s/he likes a book, since that can be experienced as an interrogation. Instead he suggests that the conversation around the book should start with “Tell me...” (Chambers, 1993/1999, p. 49) and proceed with what s/he likes and what is puzzling in the book.

One could say that the present thesis concerns all parts of Chambers’ Reading Circle: Chapter 4 is devoted to the parts of the initial sequence, Selection of books; Chapter 5 concerns the “Reading” sequence; and finally Chapters 6 and 7 focuses on different aspects of the Response sequence.

Book club routines at the Valley school

Apart from Chambers’ booktalk approach, another main source of inspiration for the book clubs was a reading development schedule (Swed. läsutvecklingsschemat, LUS) created by Bo Sundblad, Kerstin Dominković and Birgita Allard (1983, pp. 58–64). They claim that children limit their reading at a certain level of reading skill. Their 23-point model can be summed up in three main stages. During the first stage, children tend to be omnivorous; in a second stage (the 18th point) they tend to favour one specific genre, reading only one type of book (e.g., horse books, mystery stories, fantasy).

This level is sometimes referred to as the “age of book devouring” (Swed. bokslukaråldern). According to Sundblad, Dominković and Allard’s definition of the “book-devouring child”, the child reads a great deal *but* is limited to one genre. This stage is assumed (by Sundblad, Dominković and Allard) to be crucial in children’s reading, and therefore it is important that teachers and parents assist children in developing beyond one chosen genre. According to the authors, it is important both to assist children to get *into* this book devouring stage, *and* to guide them out of it by offering variation in genres to read; that is, facilitating a move into the third and more educated stage. In this matter, the reasoning of Sundblad, Dominković and Allard is thus congenial with that of Chambers.

As a compulsory part of the regular curriculum, the Valley school runs *book clubs* (Swed. läsecirklar) in grades 4 through 7. The data of the present study consist of video-recordings of teacher-led book club interactions. During one school year, two groups from each grade were video-recorded, i.e., in all eight groups.

The teacher-librarian introduced the book clubs in the classes some time before the book clubs actually started. She took some time from an ordinary lesson in each class, presenting seven to eight book titles to the pupils. The books presented were assumed by the teacher-librarian to be popular for the ages concerned, that is, 10–14 years of age. The books also represented different degrees of difficulty, and a proposed book was often the first in a series.³ The pupils chose four books and arranged them according to their preferences. Later, their choices formed the basis of how the groups were arranged. But the groups should also make it possible for the pupils to fulfil the goals of the activity, that is, to express feelings and thoughts evoked by literature. Therefore, the teacher-librarian co-operated with the class teacher and the remedial teacher – who knew the pupils’ reading skills better than the teacher-librarian – in their assignment of pupils into groups of three to eight according to the pupils’ first book choices. If several

pupils chose the same book or if a child chose a book seen as too easy or difficult, the second, third or fourth choice served as a basis for the division.

When it was time for the first book club session, all teachers leading a book club group entered the classroom of the class in question and gathered the group members. When I collection the data, I presented myself to each and every class, from which pupils would participate, at the beginning of each book club, and again explained the purpose of the project. In each class, the class teacher and the teacher-librarian led one group each, and a suitable number of other teachers in the school who were not occupied with other teaching duties had been asked to lead one group each.⁴ The groups spread out in different locations in the school, so that each group could discuss their book in tranquillity. The teacher and pupils were seated around a table, in the library or in a small room for group activities. Thus, the teacher was not fronting the room in a traditional hierarchical manner. In fact, the groups often tended to literally form book “circles” in that they were seated around relatively circular (or squarish) tables.

Every book club gathered three times, for about 30 minutes, in one fortnight. During the first session, the teacher presented the chosen book more in-depth to the pupils. S/he talked about the author, and what the story was about. Also, the pupils were asked about why they had chosen the book in question and what their expectations were. This first book club session also came to be an opportunity for the pupils to present themselves in relation to reading. Some presented themselves as “devourers of books” (Swed. bokslukare), for example Inga⁵ in grade 4: ‘och jag tycker om tjocka böcker’ (and I like thick books), Jane⁶ in grade 6: ‘jag läste ut tre böcker på två dar’ (I read three books in two days), and Sune⁷ in grade 6 ‘jag älskar att läsa’ (I love to read). Jane⁸ also presented herself as a “horse book reader”: ‘jag läser bara hästböcker hihi i min bokhylla finns det bara hästböcker’ (I read only horse books hehe there are only horse books on my bookshelf).

According to these presentations, a number of the pupils could be interpreted as stage II readers in Sundblad et al.'s (1983) scheme, or – using Chambers' vocabulary – repetitious readers of a special kind of book, excluding all other genres. That is, exactly the type of readers that Chambers (1993/1999, p.13) suggests should be challenged by an enabling adult to broaden their reading.

During the first book club session, the initial part of the book was read. Either the teacher read aloud, or the pupils took turns reading aloud. It also happened that the pupils read quietly; sometimes two or all of these alternatives occurred in the same group. At the end of the first book club session, the teacher distributed an information sheet (see Appendix C) about the “book club fortnight”, a reminder of what the pupils had been told, for example, that the group members should gather for a second meeting one week later. As a preparation for the second session, the pupils should have read the first half of the book and completed grade-specific tasks at home, such as identifying the main characters of the book. After yet another week, the third and last session, with the final report of the whole book was held. One recurrent issue in the last session was discussions about the ending.

The pupils were often asked by the teachers to evaluate the endings. Here are some authentic example of such questions by the teachers to the pupils: ‘I slutet, var det något särskilt som du tyckte var bra där?’ (Eng. ‘At the end, was there something special that you liked there?’) ‘Och ni andra som inte tyckte att det var ett dåligt slut, tyckte det var bra då?’ (Eng. ‘And the rest of you who didn't think it was a bad ending, thought it was good then?’)

Additionally, the pupils in grade 4 were expected to read aloud and start writing the reading reports. The pupils in grade 5 were to practice writing summaries and those in grade 6 were to practice writing reviews as well as summaries. The pupils in grade 7 were to write reviews. The finished tasks would be presented in the class after completion of the book club sessions.

Recorded book club events

The analytic units in this study are book club events, rather than pupils or teachers. The table exposes an overview of the collected material:

Table 1 *Overview of book clubs studied*

Grade & group	Text studied: author(s), publication year, title, English title ^a , and original title and year	No. meetings	No. girls	No. boys	No. & gender of teacher
4A	Monica Zak (1987) <i>Hjälp! Boan är lös!</i> [Help! The Boa is Loose!]	3	1	3	Female 1
4B	Lasse Ekholm (1990) <i>Smuggelkatten</i> [The Smuggled Cat]	3	4	1	Female 2
5A	Birgitta Lindblad-Nelson (1995) <i>Kampen om Visby</i> [The Struggle for Visby]	3	–	5	Female 1
5B	Molly Burkett (1988) <i>Nikki – min vän grävlingen</i> (<i>The Year of the Badger</i> , 1972)	3	3	1	Female 3
6A	Henning Mankell (1995) <i>Eldens hemlighet</i> (<i>Secrets in the Fire</i> , 2000)	3	5	4 ¹⁰	Female 1
6B	Jón Svensson & George Telemann (1989) <i>Nonni och Manni</i> [Nonni and Manni] (<i>Nonni und Manni</i> , 1988)	3	2	2	Female 4
7A	Steinar Sørllø (1989) <i>Isnatt</i> [Ice Night] (<i>Isnatt</i> , 1987)	3	3	–	Female 1
7B	Joy Cowley (1986) <i>Pojken och den vita sköldpaddan</i> (<i>The Silent One</i> , 1981)	3	2	4	Male 5
<i>Total</i>		24	20	20	5

Recordings

The video camera was located either in a corner of the room or around the corner of a bookshelf. My intention was to place it unobtrusively yet at a spot from which the camera would cover all participants. Video-recordings were preferred to audio recordings. The primary rationale for choosing video-recording was that it facilitated separating the pupils' voices from one another, which

was particularly helpful since the video camera would be left in the room without the researcher supervising the sessions. Also, it was possible to study the participants' non-verbal responses and initiatives.

In all, I video-recorded 24 book club sessions. However, due to technical mistakes, the recordings lack sound in three cases (5A:1, 5B:2, 6A:1), which means that there are 21 transcribed book sessions (Table 2).

Table 2 *Orientation of videotapes*

Grade	Group	Book club session	Date ¹¹	Tape
4	A	1:3	September 1998	1
4	A	2:3	September 1998	1
4	A	3:3	October 1998	2
4	B	1:3	September 1998	3
4	B	Part I of 2:3	September 1998	3
4	B	Part II of 2:3	September 1998	4
4	B	3:3	October 1998	4
5	A	2:3	February 1999	8
5	A	3:3	February 1999	10
5	B	1:3	January 1999	9
5	B	3:3	February 1999	10
6	A	2:3	April 1999	11
6	A	3:3	April 1999	11
6	B	1:3	April 1999	12
6	B	2:3	April 1999	12
6	B	3:3	April 1999	13
7	A	1:3	November 1998	5
7	A	2:3	November 1998	6
7	A	3:3	November 1998	7
7	B	1:3	November 1998	5
7	B	2:3	November 1998	6
7	B	3:3	November 1998	7
<i>Total no. of sessions:</i>		21		

Transcription and translation

All book club dialogues were transcribed. I have followed Per Linell's (1994) recommendations to establish a base transcription. Potter and Wetherell (1995) argue in favour of an *in extenso* transcription instead of only transcribing the interesting parts of a research material. The researcher is advised to make analytical notes during the transcription process, since ideas often appear as early as this initial stage (Potter, 1998, p. 136). I have followed this recommendation and made an *in extenso* transcription of all book club sessions: in total approximately 450 A4 pages of roughly transcribed conversations. Yet, as regards the degree of detail, I have settled with a rough base level as Linell suggests, since the focus of the analysis is not the linguistic details in the utterances (Linell, 1994, p. 14).

I indexed the material from these rough transcriptions and repeated viewing of the videotapes (for type of indexing see Chapters 5–7). The indices, along with further re-reading of the rough transcriptions and repeated videotape viewing, helped me choose sequences to transcribe more closely. The transcriptions cover overlaps, emphasis, loudness, pauses, and prolongation of sounds and latching.

A native English professional translator has translated the extracts in collaboration with the author.

Transcription conventions

Transcription symbols are mainly based on conversation analysis and discursive psychology (cf. Edwards, 1997).

[]	Square brackets mark the start and end of overlapping speech.
<u>Underlining</u>	Signals emphasis; the extent of underlining within individual words locates emphasis.
Bold	Pronunciation differs from surrounding speech, e.g. irony, theatrical.
CAPITALS	Mark speech that is obviously louder than surrounding speech.

° °	Quieter speech.
(4)	Measure pauses in seconds.
(.)	Micropause.
((Text.))	Transcriber's comments.
:	Prolongation of preceding vowel.
> <	Speeded-up talk.
< >	Slower than surrounding talk.
=	Immediate "latching" of successive talk.
–	Utterance interrupted or ebbed away.
(. . .)	Talk has been omitted from a data example.
(text)	Uncertain interpretation.
(x) (xx)	Inaudible word or words.
hehe	Laughter.

When using the square brackets for overlapping speech, the technique sometimes causes an overly long space between the letters; such spaces do not have any significance. All omissions of talk were marked in the extracts; in some cases the omitted time, or number of turns, was indicated. Omitted passages have no significance for the focus of the example in question; they could, for example, concern someone mistakenly entering the room where the book club took place. Laughter and giggles are standardised to 'hehe' (Swed. 'hihi') since the quality of laughter is not analysed in the present study.

Ethical considerations

The data collection has been designed taking into consideration the ethical recommendations of The Swedish Council for Research in the Humanities and Social Sciences (Swed. HSFR).¹² A good relation to the key persons was fundamental to gaining access to children's environments and to getting the parents' approval for the children to participate. All participants and the children's parents were informed about the study so that they should be able to understand the aim of the study and base a decision on participation on that information.¹³

The names of the town, the school, the pupils and the personnel were changed in order to achieve anonymity for the participants. The pupils and the book club leader were promised that the recorded tapes would not be shown to anyone outside of the research team. All collected material has been treated with confidentiality. One complication in working with qualitative data is that arguments gain strength through extracts, which means that a person might recognise her/his utterance. The ethical recommendations of HSFR include that the participants should give their consent without feeling any pressure. This can be a bit tricky in a study like this, since the pupils are approached via the school personnel. The pupils can perceive participation in the study as obligatory or advantageous in terms of getting better grades. To avoid this, the researcher has – as far as possible – tried not to enter into an alliance with the school staff. Yet, a researcher in a school setting is quite dependent on the school personnel.

A problem in this particular study is that the participants can remember which text was treated in their group, even when the thesis is published years after the book clubs took place. It has therefore been important to treat the material so that the participants will feel respected. The present study has been informed by ethnographic methods, and, in particular, the analyses of *emic* notions, that is, the participants own thinking and rationality.

On “natural” data

The present work can be described as an ethnographic study of naturally occurring *literary events*. Ethnography – i.e. “folk writing” – emphasises the exploring of particular social phenomena rather than testing hypotheses about them (Atkinson & Hammerley, 1994). Traditionally, ethnographic work has normally involved participant observation. In the present study, a video camera, so to speak, “participated” and “observed” in the researcher’s stead (another example of this is Sparrman, 2002). Rather than

undertaking field notes, I have transcribed booktalk sessions (eight series), during one school year.

To further clarify what “natural data” mean in this particular study, the data used will be compared with an imagined research scenario: a group interview. In both the present data, that is, the book club conversations, and in a group interview, someone *initiates* the conversation. In the book club, this is done by a pedagogue, and in an interview by the researcher/interviewer. Can something initiated be “natural”? Yes, if you by natural mean something that takes place regardless of the *researcher’s* presence. To test this, you could imagine the researcher’s disappearance or sudden death during the data collection. Thus, if the researcher did not show up and rig the video camera to record the book clubs they would continue anyway (the change would be that they would not be recorded – a fact that of course makes the book clubs more natural in the general sense of the word), but the group interviews would not take place at all. This is thus analogous to Potter’s *not-born-researcher-test* (1996a, p. 135).

Thus the word “natural” is used here to describe situations that are part of ongoing, already-occurring activities, as opposed to situations that are constructed or initiated by researchers. “Natural” is in the present study thus *not* used as synonymous with “spontaneous”. It is also obvious that the participants were at least minimally affected by their knowledge that the sessions were recorded, but for ethical reasons we obviously have to accept this kind of influence on the data. Yet, the book clubs involved a great deal of unrestrained interactions, and, at large, the atmosphere seemed quite relaxed. For the sake of clarity, one could however state that this study concerns *researched* book clubs.

Analytical procedure

Working with “natural data”, in this case recorded conversations and children’s books, I could chose among a number of analytic

procedures. In ethnomethodology, conversation analysis (CA), as well as in discursive psychology there is a fundamental assumption that the most basic feature of examination is that accounts are situated as social interactions.

In the field of discursive psychology, the notion of *discourse* embraces both text and talk, which suites this multi-data study well. In brief, critical discourse analysis departs from a power perspective at a macro level and then studies the micro level that is influenced by the macro level. Discourse analysis has a dual focus on the studied practice itself and on the resources that are drawn upon in the very same practices (Potter, 1997, p. 148). Since a starting point for this thesis is both the practice of book clubs in school and the books and other resources drawn upon in the book club events, discourse analysis was chosen as a suitable method. (See also Chapter 2.)

In the analyses in the present thesis, procedures from discourse analysis will be used. Methods in discourse analysis have been discussed in several recent books (e.g. Edwards & Potter, 1992; Potter, 1996b). Here follows a brief summary of methodological recommendations with added examples of how they were used in the present data treatment.

As mentioned above, Jonathan Potter and Margaret Wetherell argue in favour of an *in extenso* transcription instead of only transcribing the interesting parts of the material (Potter & Wetherell, 1995, p. 86). The researcher is advised to make analytical notes during the transcription (Potter, 1998, p. 136).

Potter and Wetherell (1994, p. 55) enumerate five aspects that are considered important and therefore should be regarded when analysing discourse (See also Potter, 1998, pp. 136–137):

(1) *Variation* The researcher can use variation in and between the participants' contributions as an analytical lever. The study of variation makes it possible to identify and explain activities that are expressed in text and talk. Variation in discourse can be studied in individuals, between individuals and between what is said and

what might have been said. One phenomenon can thus be studied in different shapes. As an illustration of verbal variation, one can, for example, look at *stake inoculation* (Potter, 1997, pp. 150–158). Stake inoculation, against undermining in conversation, can be performed by expressions like “I dunno”, “they would, wouldn’t they”, “initially sceptical, but” – thus, three variations of the same phenomenon.

For example, when analysing my transcripts, I identified variation in a pupil’s way of responding. After several hesitations, a pupil might interrupt another speaker with a straightforward utterance. In one context this was interpreted as an expression of a breakthrough insight.

(2) *Details* Observing discursive details has also proven to be productive. The details of the interaction can preferably be studied through a close reading of the transcriptions. In this matter, Potter and Wetherell draw on Harvey Sacks’ argument that all details – such as pauses, word choice and repairs – in a sequence of discourse are potentially there for a reason (cf. Sacks, Schegloff, & Jefferson, 1974). They are either part of an action or have consequences for the outcome of the interaction.

Details such as pauses can be interpreted as resistance, for example, if the teacher asks a question and no one answers. (Cf. Chapter 7.)

(3) *Rhetorical organisation* The rhetorical organisation should also be studied. Both the organisation for making arguments and the design to undermine alternative views can fecundate the analysis. The analysis of rhetorical organisation draws the attention away from questions about how a version is related to “reality”; instead it focuses the relation to competing alternatives. One way to unravel rhetorical organisation is to compare different versions.

In, for example, a study of gender, different versions of a description, from gender traditional to gender neutral, can be examined. (Cf. Chapter 6.)

(4) *Accountability* Noting how actions are explained in the discourse facilitates the understanding of what these actions are. The analysis should treat *how* the accounts are made, not how *well* they are made.

The focus of this study is descriptive rather than normative, i.e. it will display and problemize how booktalk discussions proceeded, but it will not, for example, suggest how booktalk discussions could be improved. (Cf. Chapter 5.)

(5) *Cross-referring* Finally, Potter and Wetherell underline the importance of building on earlier analysis in different domains. One example: research on interaction in institutional settings can profit from studies both of everyday conversation and of discourse patterns in other institutional settings.

Since the present study is an instance of interdisciplinary work, the recommendation to perform cross-referring is relevant (Potter, 1998; Potter & Wetherell, 1994). For example, both literary sources and social theory are drawn upon throughout the different analyses.

Notes

1. A teacher-librarian is a teacher who works in a school library but lacks a diploma from a librarian education. In this case, the teacher-librarian is the head of the library and the only library staff member. In Swedish schools this is not an unusual situation.

2. Chambers places “reading” in quotation marks since the notion is much broader than scanning the words of a page.

3. Behind the idea of choosing the first book in a series, there is a belief that even children with reading disability can become “bookworms” (Swed. “bokmalar”, literally “book moths”) (Sundblad *et al.*, 1983).

4. In this case, handicraft and sports teachers were included; however, none of their groups were video-recorded for the present investigation.

5. Group A, Session 1:3, tape 1, start at 00.00.33.

6. Group B, Session 1:3, tape 12, start at 00.29.58.

7. Group B, Session 1:3, tape 12, start at 00.29.11.

8. Grade 6:B, Session 1:3, tape 12, start at 00.29.35.

9. Brackets signal that the book does not exist in English, in these cases I have translated the title (American Psychological Association, 1994).

10. One boy took the initiative to leave the group after the first session. The class teacher and the teacher-librarian – leading this particular book club – agreed since the boy found the book too difficult and it had been his third choice. The boy in question completed the book-reading and book club tasks on his own.

11. In order to protect the participants' anonymity, only year and month are mentioned.

12. It is now called the Swedish Research Council (Swed. Vetenskapsrådet).

13. See Appendix B.

BOOKS TO PROMOTE READING

A presentation of 8 narratives

Introduction: Problem formulation

In terms of Aidan Chambers' (1993/1999) booktalk approach, the Selection of books is the first step in The Reading Circle.

Below, I will present brief narrative analyses of setting, main characters, plot, and point of view in the eight books involved in the studied book clubs. I will also present some themes that could initiate discussions on existential issues. This presentation is needed as a background to understanding the booktalk about these books in Chapters 5–7. Moreover, and perhaps most importantly, these books can be seen as an authentic sample of books chosen to promote reading in a Swedish school today. It is, of course, not a strictly representative sample. Yet, it is a sample of books that have, indeed been used to promote reading. Also, these books have been used several times in the same school.

Drawing on the sample of children's books from the studied book clubs, it would be possible to draw some conclusions about what type of books a Swedish teacher-librarian today considers to promote reading for middle school pupils (here: aged 10–14 years).

First of all, I will present basic data on the eight books (Table 3).

Table 3 *Overview of the books chosen*

Grade & group	Text studied: author(s), publication year, title, English title ¹ , and original title and publication year	No. pages	Illustrations
4A	Monica Zak (1987) <i>Hjälp! Boan är lös!</i> [Help! The Boa is Loose!]	165	C. 40 black and white drawings and wash-drawings, caricaturing scribbles
4B	Lasse Ekholm (1990) <i>Smuggelkatten</i> [The Smuggled Cat]	81	14 black and white drawings
5A	Birgitta Lindblad-Nelson (1995) <i>Kampen om Visby</i> [The Struggle for Visby]	187	C. 20 black and white drawings
5B	Molly Burkett (1988) <i>Nikki – min vän grävlingen</i> (<i>The Year of the Badger</i> , 1972)	117	–
6A	Henning Mankell (1995) <i>Eldens hemlighet</i> (<i>Secrets in the Fire</i> , 2000)	162	–
6B	Jón Svensson & George Telemann (1989) <i>Nonni och Manni</i> [Nonni and Manni] (<i>Nonni und Manni</i> , 1988)	220	–
7A	Steinar Sørlle (1989) <i>Isnatt</i> [Ice Night] (<i>Isnatt</i> , 1987)	127	–
7B	Joy Cowley (1986) <i>Pojken och den vita sköldpaddan</i> (<i>The Silent One</i> , 1981)	131	12 black and white full-page drawings

As shown above, half of the chosen books were original Swedish works. Two were translations from English (Burkett, 1988/1989; Cowley, 1986), and one each were from Norwegian (Sørlle, 1989) and German (J. Svensson & Telemann, 1989). The oldest book was published in Swedish in 1986, and the most recent was published in 1995, that is, three years before the studied book club sessions began, which means that none of the books were newly published. As can be seen, only one of the original Swedish books (Mankell's *Eldens hemlighet*) has been translated to English.

None of the authors had a top ranking on the list of Swedish library loans. Yet, relatively well-known authors have written several of the books. Henning Mankell, the author of *Eldens hemlig-*

het, is a Swedish author, well known as a writer of both detective stories for adults and books for young people. He is the only author of the above-mentioned who had a high position at the national top list of authors according to library loans, ranked 15th at the time of the study (*De mest utlånade författarna i folk- och skolbibliotek* 1998 [*The most borrowed authors at municipal and school libraries* 1998], 1999, p. 1).² Next most borrowed in the present sample is Monica Zak, author of *Hjälp! Boan är lös!*, at place 146 on the list (*De mest utlånade författarna i folk- och skolbibliotek* 1998 [*The most borrowed authors at municipal and school libraries* 1998], 1999, p. 4). Lasse Ekholm, the author of *Smuggelkatten*, was also in fact placed on the list, but in 186th place out of 200 (*De mest utlånade författarna i folk- och skolbibliotek* 1998 [*The most borrowed authors at municipal and school libraries* 1998], 1999, p. 5).

The publishing house of *Kampen om Visby*, Hegas, specialises in so called easy-to-read literature. Their publications are arranged in series, with increasing levels of difficulty. *Kampen om Visby* is included in the so called Varg-serien (Eng. the Wolf-series), characterised by excitement and drama, at a difficulty level 5 of 8.

Smuggelkatten, *Pojken och den vita sköldpaddan*, *Hjälp! Boan är lös!* and *Eldens hemlighet* were all reviewed in major daily newspapers (cf. Lundqvist, 1990; Sandman Lilius, 1987; Toijer-Nilsson, 1987; Werkelid, 1995). All books, except *Nikki – min vän grävlingen*, were reviewed in the catalogue over newly published books (*Sambindningslista. Böcker & AV-media* [*The book department's list: Books and audiovisual media*]), issued by The Swedish Library Association (Swed. Bibliotekstjänst, BTJ) once every fortnight.

There is a common assumption that the younger the child is, the shorter the book s/he prefers. Analogously, the younger the child is, the more illustrations s/he prefers. Table 3 shows that it was not really possible to see such patterns in the frequency of illustrations and the age of the presumed reader; both books read in grade 4

were illustrated, but only one of the books in grade 5. One of the groups with the oldest pupils, that is grade 7, also read an illustrated book. Nor was it possible to see any neat relation between the number of pages and ages of the presumed readers; the shortest book was indeed read by the youngest pupils, but the oldest pupils read the next shortest one. Also, number of pages is a deceptive measurement since layout and typography also determine the length of a text.

Narrative analysis

The present part of the thesis concerns the texts as such. In the description I will use the following notions to give an impression of all eight books in an abbreviated way: setting, point of view, characters and plot.

These notions are drawn from narrative theory (for further reading see Chatman, 1978/1993; Genette, 1988; Prince, 1982; Rimmon-Kenan, 1983). The literary terminology used is mainly based on Gerald Prince's *A Dictionary of Narratology* (1987). The rationale for choosing narrative theory was its focus on the text. Applying notions from narrative theory in the description of the books, and placing them in relation to literature for children, may hopefully facilitate an understanding of the books for readers of the present thesis who have not read them. Also, it will facilitate the reading of Chapters 5–7. Narratology, and analyses drawing on narratology, has also been used in earlier presentations and studies of children's literature, internationally (cf. Sutherland, Monson, & Arbuthnot, 1981; Wall, 1991; Vandergrift, 1986) as well as in Sweden (cf. Edström, 1980/1994; Nikolajeva, 1998). It should be noted, however, that this will not be an in-depth account of all aspects of the chosen notions from a narratological perspective, nor will the above-mentioned notions that feature in the texts studied be fully analysed. The aim of the present chapter is merely to present a descriptive analysis of the eight books.

In the interpretation of the texts, I will – like Janice Radway in her analysis of romances – partly depart from the readers’ responses (Radway, 1984/1991).

As mentioned above, the present analyses of the books chosen will be grounded in literary theory, but they will be primarily limited to phenomena discussed by the participants (pupils and teachers) themselves.³ For example, the setting will be analysed since it was discussed when talking about where the events in a book took place. Likewise, the plot will be analysed, as what happened was talked about in all sessions.

Setting

Maria Nikolajeva claims that the modern historical novel typically deals with ordinary people, even if the setting concerns famous historical events; while classical historical novels, like for example those written by Alexandre Dumas, require historically correct descriptions (Nikolajeva, 1998). Historical time can be seen as a “foreign” setting. Foreign settings in a more literal sense have become more and more frequent in children’s literature, according to Vivi Edström (1980/1994), who argues that the orientation towards settings in foreign parts of the world in children’s literature has undergone great changes since the 1950s in Sweden. A significant number of books set in foreign milieus were published in the 1950s and 1960s; wild and beautiful nature from exotic countries often dominated in these texts. Didactic information about other countries was also a prominent feature. In the 1970s, books about foreign countries, especially developing countries, increased. Attempts to concretise difficult problems, as for example political violence and poverty, for children were made. Later in that decade, social and cultural conditions were focused. Often in such books, the description of the setting contained social criticism.

Only one of the eight books, *Kampen om Visby*, is set in historical time. The story takes place on the Swedish island Gotland in

1361, the time for the famous battle in which Sweden lost both its Baltic islands to Danish rule, lasting for 300 years. The *chronotope* involved, that is, the space-time (Bakhtin, 1998, p. 84), is indicated already in the second paragraph of the first chapter of the book: “Det var den 27 juli, 1361. Bara fem dagar tidigare hade Kung Valdemar av Danmark och hela hans här landstigit nere på södra Gotland.” [It was 27 July 1361. Only five days earlier, King Valdemar of Denmark and his whole army had disembarked in the south of Gotland.] (Lindblad-Nelson, (1995, p. 7) It thus concerns a famous historical event as in the classical historical novels. The main plot is, however, centred on a young boy from a merchant family and his servant – that is on “ordinary” people, not historical persons such as queens and kings. *Kampen om Visby* can therefore be characterised as a modern historical novel, according to Nikolajeva’s terminology.

Notably, the remaining seven books are all – at least partly – set in foreign settings for the supposed readers. *Nonni och Manni*, *Isnatt* and *Nikki – min vän grävlingen* are foreign in the sense that they are translations of stories that take place in Icelandic, Norwegian and British settings, respectively. Furthermore, *Nonni och Manni* is a *retrospective* story – that is, treating past time but during the author’s lifetime (Nikolajeva, 1998) – from the turn of the century 1900. The story is located in the Icelandic landscape, and nature plays a significant role in the events. Nature is also important for the story of *Isnatt*; here the story is located in a Norwegian fjord. *Nikki – min vän grävlingen* likewise takes place in the countryside, the British countryside. *Pojken och den vita sköldpaddan* is also translated; additionally it is set in an island in the Pacific, which would thus be foreign even for most of the supposed original New Zealander readers. Correspondingly, *Eldens hemlighet* is written by a Swedish author, but set in the war-torn countryside of Mozambique. *Smuggelkatten* and *Hjälp! Boan är lös!* are both, mainly, set in today’s Sweden; however, *Smuggelkatten* starts in Greece during a vacation trip and ends up in a

Swedish town; whereas *Hjälp! Boan är lös!* is a Swedish city story that ends up in the jungles of Guatemala, where the hero is involved in releasing an endangered snake species.

Nikolajeva (1998) claims that modern children's books rarely deal with the big world. The books in the book clubs, thus, all differ from the prototypical modern children's books.

Point of view

Traditionally, the point of view in children's literature mainly follows two well-established tracks: the omniscient narrator tells the story in the third person or there is a first person narrator. This was also the case in the books studied. *Kampen om Visby*, *Eldens hemlighet*, *Isnatt*, *Pojken och den vita sköldpaddan* were all told by an omnipresent narrator, while *Smuggelkatten*, *Nikki – min vän grävlingen* and *Nonni och Manni* were first person narratives. In *Hjälp! Boan är lös!*, the narrator was an omnipresent third person except in three first-person parts, which were told from the dog Hampus' point of view. All eight books were, thus, rather typical children's books.

Also, none of the studied books had a *double* address, that is, a type of address where the child and the adult reader are addressed alternately (Wall, 1991). Without having studied it in-depth, I would call *Isnatt* and *Eldens hemlighet* the only possible candidates among the studied books for categorisation as using *dual* address, that is, when the child and the adult reader are addressed simultaneously. The remaining books follow the rather strong child-centred tradition in Swedish children's literature, and thus apply a *single* address, whereby only a child reader is addressed.

Characters

The main character of a story is also called the *protagonist* (cf. Prince, 1987, p. 78). This character is the one around whom the

events of the story centre. Around that character, a story normally contains subordinate, or *minor*, characters. A priori, it would seem easy to distinguish between the main character and the minor characters, but it is not always obvious who is who.

Identification of the main character of the story was an important issue in the book clubs studied. This was one of the obligatory tasks during the second session.

Literary characters can be *static* or *dynamic* and *flat* (*two-dimensional*) or *round* (*multidimensional*) (Prince, 1987, p. 12). Dynamic characters change during the progression of the story, static characters do not. Flat characters are less developed in the text than round characters, who are depicted as fully developed humans. Usually, flat characters only have few qualities and behave predictably, while round characters have several qualities, positive as well as negative, and are capable of surprising behaviour.

Sofia, the main character of *Eldens hemlighet*, is indeed described as a complex human being, that is, both dynamic and round. She displays a wide range of human feelings: happiness, thoughtfulness, sorrow, despair, guilt, loneliness, hopefulness, and joy. Of all the characters in the studied books, she is the one that changes the most in the progression of the story. Sofia develops from a happy little girl, living protected by her parents in a village with her sister and brother, into an independent self-supporting mutilated young girl, living on her own; having lost her sister and left her mother, brother and stepfather. Sofia's life transformation occurs during her journey as an internal refugee in Mozambique. *Eldens hemlighet* can thus be characterised as a *Bildungsroman*, a novel of development. The traditional novel of development dates back to the 18th century (cf. Järnstad, 1996). The customary procedure in a *bildungsroman* would embrace a hero (the genre is traditionally male) leaving his home to discover the world. During his travels he would meet sinful as well as chaste women, and intellectual and spiritual guides. In the end, the hero would settle down and adjust to society, perhaps with a disillusioned vision of life.

Important changes in the characters occur also in some of the remaining books studied, however not as radical as those in *Eldens hemlighet*. One example is the merchant's son Thorfein, 15-year-old, who becomes friends with his servant Ulf at the end of *Kampen om Visby*. Thorfein is the main character in the book, and Ulf is a very important minor character.

Another character that changes is Kjell in *Isnatt* who overcomes his own fears and original self-image of being a coward, through saving his sister Tina and their common male friend Leif. The adventures in *Isnatt* occur around these three youngsters; Kjell however, is focused upon to a higher degree than the others.

The gender division among the authors of the books was even; half the authors were male, and half female. Also, there was an equal (50-50 percent) gender division among the children who participated in the book clubs. Yet, only two out of eight books had a female main character. These were the young girl Anna in *Smuggelkatten* and the young girl Sofia in *Eldens hemlighet*. The major characters in *Smuggelkatten*, apart from the heroine Anna, are her father, a cat called Drama, her paternal grandmother, and Anna's friend Per. The remaining characters in *Eldens hemlighet* are Sofia's sister Maria and their mother Lydia.

In the remaining six books, the principal characters are thus male, though there are important minor female characters. The Swedish translation of *Nikki – min vän grävlingen* is however a special case with regard to gender. (See Chapter 6.) The sex of the narrator is male, but this is not revealed until page 111, that is at the very end of the book. At this final point, it is apparent that the narrator is a boy, since the parents are buying a suit for – him. (In the original English book, however, the sex of the narrator is revealed on the blurb.) The remaining characters of the story are the badger Nikki, and her “adoptive” family consisting of a mother, a father, a daughter – Sophie, the younger sister of the narrator, and the family dog, Tessa.

The main character in *Hjälp! Boan är lös!* is a 24-year-old casual labourer called Guttav. The minor characters are his friends, 11-year-old Frida and Rickard who are fourth grade pupils, and Guttav's mother Birgit, called Isidora. Guttav's real name is, of course, Gustav, but he has been called Guttav ever since the junior level of the compulsory school when he constantly misspelled his name. The characters have a shared interest in animals. In the household of Guttav and Isidora, we also find the boa Karo, the rat Hildur, the parrot Polydor, the spider Mrs Adams, the gecko Ace Crawford, 22 grass snakes, and later, the dog Hampus.

In *Nonni och Manni*, the main character is Nonni Svensson. Together with his younger brother Manni and their father's friend Harald, Nonni experiences adventures in Iceland.

In *Pojken och den vita sköldpaddan*, the boy referred to in the title is the deaf-mute orphan Jonasi. The minor characters are his friend Asaki, his stepmother Luiza, and his stepbrother Samu.

Plot

With regard to what the books "were about", the discussions in the book clubs mainly circled around two classifications: adventure books and animal books, in the terminology used in the present school.

The "typical" plot in children's literature follows the structure of the folktale: home – breaking up from home – adventure – coming home (cf. Propp, 1958, p. 25-59). *Kampen om Visby*, *Nonni och Manni*, *Eldens hemlighet*, *Isnatt* all roughly follow this classical pattern. In *Kampen om Visby*, Thorfein leaves home to fight King Valdemar of Denmark and returns home after surviving several adventures. Nonni and his brother Manni also leave home, their mission is to exonerate their future stepfather from a false accusation of manslaughter. Mission completed and a few adventures later, they return home to their mother.

Sofia in *Eldens hemlighet* leaves home with her mother and siblings. Some of Sofia's adventures are experienced with them. After an accident that killed her sister and led to the amputation of Sofia's legs, Sofia meets with adventures of her own. The home she "returns" to is her own, a new and more safe one than the original.

The plot in *Isnatt* is unique, in that it takes place during a single night. Three youngsters drift out on an ice floe and are thus, forced to spend a cold winter night on an island. After Kjell's courageous ride on an ice floe ashore, they are rescued and the story ends at their parents' homes.

In *Pojken och den vita sköldpaddan*, the pattern is faintly outlined. The main character, Jonasi, is a foundling. Since he is a deaf-mute, some of the Pacific islanders believe that he has magical powers and that he was brought to the island by a white turtle. Jonasi meets a white turtle and becomes friends with it, which increases the islanders' fear of him. When natural disasters occur on the island, the islanders blame Jonasi. His friends therefore want to move him to a school for deaf-mutes in a town. But on his way to the town Jonasi throws himself off the boat to the town and commits suicide by letting himself be dragged down into the ocean by his friend, the white turtle.

In a metaphorical sense, one could read this plot as home (the ocean) – breaking up from home (being put in a boat at sea for adoption) – adventure (events on the island) – coming home (returning to the ocean, for good, when drowning himself).

As can be seen, several of the present books can, at least partly, be classified as animal books (as for example *Nikki – min vän grävlingen*), and most of them contain "adventures" (for example *Nonni och Manni*), and some contain both elements (like *Hjälp! Boan är lös!*).

Fiction and life

The Swedish syllabus celebrates fiction as an entry to existential issues, and to our understanding of the world and of ourselves. Fiction is also seen as a source of knowledge about living conditions of men and women, throughout history and in different countries.

The books discussed in the present study correspond to some of these features. All books are, at least partly, set in “foreign” milieus. The books also mirror the general Swedish child-centeredness, in that all books, at large, have a single (child) addressee. This offers possibilities for identification and self-understanding. Furthermore, all of the books features child heroes (in *Hjälp! Boan är lös!*, a 24-year-old is the hero, but he has two 11-year-olds as closest minor characters). Concerning the living conditions of women and men, however, there is a male preponderance; only two of the eight books have a female main character.

All the eight books involved themes that possibly could initiate discussions on existential issues. Without cataloguing all of them (several issues were invoked in more than one book), a sample will be presented below. In *Hjälp! Boan är lös!*, freedom was at stake: both in a concrete sense, freedom for the endangered snake species the boa constrictor, and in an abstract meaning, freedom for humans to live in non conformist ways, for example, be a mum and prefer dancing to house work and to live under an exotic false name. *Smuggelkatten* involved a number of themes touching big issues; one of them was living with separated parents. The young hero of the medieval story *Kampen om Visby* became friends with his servant at the end of the book; one theme was thus friendship over class boundaries. Caring about animals was a recurrent theme; it could be traced in *Hjälp! Boan är lös!*, *Smuggelkatten* and in *Nikki – min vän grävlingen*. As earlier mentioned, the heroes of *Hjälp! Boan är lös!* smuggled snakes out of Sweden, into Guatemala; thereby breaking the law in order to help animals. The heroine of

Smuggelkatten, both broke the law and sacrificed her savings for her friendship with the cat that she smuggled from Greece. The narrator of *Nikki – min vän grävlingen* and his family, who devote their lives to rehabilitate animals, save the wounded badger Nikki. Death and mortal danger are the overarching themes of *Eldens hemlighet*; how a little girl in a country marked by civil war copes with the violent death of her father, and with living as a refugee, stepping on a landmine that kills her younger sister and mutilates herself. In *Nonni och Manni*, themes like loyalty can be traced in the two main characters struggle to exculpate their father's friend from a false murder accusation. The characters of *Isnatt* experience a night of mortal danger and are thereby exposed to additional affliction like love, sibling rivalry and jealousy. Life itself is at stake in *Pojken och den vita sköldpaddan*; after years of exclusion, the hero commits suicide at the end of the book.

The absent father

The fathers constitute another interesting issue in these eight books: in *Hjälp! Boan är lös!* the father of the hero is never even mentioned. In *Smuggelkatten*, he is divorced from the heroine's mother but he is still present in the heroines' life. In *Kampen om Visby*, *Eldens hemlighet*, *Nonni och Manni* the father is dead, while the main character of *Pojken och den vita sköldpaddan* is an orphan. The only two nuclear families in these books are those of *Nikki – min vän grävlingen* and *Isnatt*.

As shown above, all eight books applied in the booktalk sessions involve some type of existential issue: freedom, separation, loyalty, and death. Potentially, these books thus may promote discussions about existential issues. In the following chapters, that is Chapters 5–7, I will analyse in what ways existential and other issues imprints on the actual booktalk.

Notes

1. Brackets signal that the book does not exist in English, in these cases I have translated the title (American Psychological Association, 1994).

2. The statistics on the most borrowed authors are the only available ones. However, each individual library can separate the titles if they establish statistics. As an example, none of the books in the study was on the top-ten list of borrowed titles in Stockholm in 1996 (Steinsaphir, 1997).

3. Yet, the literary phenomena were, of course, not necessarily discussed using literary terms. For instance, the pupils discussed 'what happened' and not 'the plot'.

BOOKTALK DILEMMAS

Teachers' organisation of pupils' reading*

ABSTRACT The syllabus for Mother-tongue teaching in Sweden states that an essential goal is that pupils, in conversation with others, should be able to express feelings and thoughts evoked by literature. The present paper addresses how schools try to promote pupils' reading, examining authentic school-run booktalk conversations from a discursive approach. The data consists of video-recorded sessions with small groups of pupils in grades 4–7. A series of booktalk dilemmas were identified. The studied so-called book clubs were aimed at promoting reading for pleasure. Yet, literary practices were, at times, transformed into (i) calculating tasks, (ii) vocabulary lessons, or, (iii) reading aloud exercises. Another complication concerned the synchronising of the pupils' reading that led to extensive negotiations on the part of teacher and pupils.

Keywords: Booktalk, dilemmas, discourse analysis, literature pedagogy.

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We don't know what we think about a book until we've talked about it.
(Chambers, 1993/1999, p. 15)

Booktalk practices and Mother-tongue teaching

The Swedish compulsory school subject “Swedish” (Swed. *svenska*) includes both language and literature (Skolverket [National Agency for Education], 1996, p. 76). The syllabus for this subject states that a key goal is that pupils, in conversation with others, be able to express feelings and thoughts evoked by literature. The step from syllabus to practice is, however, not unproblematic. For one thing, the syllabus does not give any advice on *how* to achieve the goals. Also, the individual teacher has a number of other goals to consider in her/his daily responsibilities. The object of the present investigation is to examine the functions of authentic¹ booktalk practices in everyday life settings: in this case, school-run literary conversations.² It involves an attempt at a systematic description of how booktalk is established in teacher-pupil collaboration in group-work contexts. The main research question addresses how schools try to promote reading for pleasure. Sub-questions concern how teachers act, and how individual pupils interact – with one another and with the teacher – in relation to reading for pleasure.

Booktalk as an approach to reading

Aidan Chambers (1985/2000; 1991/1996; 1993/1999), author of children's books and literature teacher, has published several works advising how to encourage children to verbalise their literary experiences. In 1985, he coined the term *booktalk* for talk about reading in reader-response contexts (Chambers, 1985/2000). To Chambers (1993/1999), talk about books is an essential part of reading. He describes the reading process as a circle: Chambers calls the first sequence the Selection of books, the second sequence the Reading-time and the third the Response. After the Response

follows a new Selection, and so forth. Chambers stresses the importance of an *enabling adult* to support the child at every phase in the Reading Circle. Thus, his view is that children need adults. Chambers (1991/1996, p. 15) claims that an experienced guide is the best company for learner readers, yet he acknowledges that learners learn from one another and that enablers do, in fact, learn from their novices.

According to Chambers, the Selection sequence includes book stock, availability, accessibility and presentation. In a school, this concerns questions like variety of purchase, opening hours of the school library or distance to a local library, and how the books are stored on the shelves. This sequence is only meaningful if time is set aside for *reading* what has been selected. Chambers claims that the Reading sequence involves both reading to yourself and hearing someone read aloud. The final sequence – the Response – contains the essential point in Chambers' ideas: the importance of *talk* to reading. The quotation above – “We don't know what we think about a book until we've talked about it.” (Chambers, 1993/1999, p. 15) – is, in a way, a motto for Chambers' approach to improving how we teach children to become (literary) readers. The present study concerns the Response sequence of Chambers' Reading Circle.

Theoretically, the focus on book conversation is congenial with a discursive turn in the social science and humanities (Billig *et al.*, 1988; Edwards, 1997; Potter, 1996b). Since Chambers stresses the importance of talk in teaching children to become readers, I have chosen to work with a methodology grounded in discursive psychology.

Discursive psychology and dilemmas

Discursive psychology is based on constructionism (Edwards, 1997; Edwards & Potter, 1992). A basic assumption in this approach is that language is a type of *social action* (Edwards, 1997, p. 84). Language is, of course, also a grammatical system that

codes knowledge and experience, but what humans do with this system is social. Therefore, the analytical unit in discursive psychology is text and talk in interaction, that is, discourse. Following this focus, discursively oriented researchers investigate the social meanings that the participants themselves orient towards in talk-in-interaction.

One research area in discursive psychology has been ideological dilemmas (Billig *et al.*, 1988). According to Billig *et al.* (1988, pp. 10–11), a dilemma is a situation in which a person must choose between alternative courses of action with seemingly equivalent gains and losses. One empirical practice in which dilemmas have been studied is education. Billig *et al.* argue that the educational system is seen as governed by two contrasting ideological systems: the democratic (progressive) and the authoritarian (traditional). These are both at work at different levels of educational dilemmas. In what teachers say about education there are traces of both ideologies, and in what teachers do, there are dilemmas between the two ideologies as well as between what teachers say and what they do (Billig *et al.*, 1988). However, in authentic educational practices these two contradictory ideologies could be seen as alternative expressions of one dilemmatic ideology, according to Billig *et al.* (1988, p. 54). Rather, values like freedom and constraint are in tension.

Booktalk dilemmas

The focus of the present study is on dilemmas in what teachers do, in relation to curricula and ideals. Chambers advocates keeping the pupils' *pleasure* and *choice* to read in focus for booktalk. This could, however, come in conflict with the substantial technical and teacher-led organisation involved in the book club practice studied.

In the present study, I will discuss how teachers' organisation of pupils' reading involves dilemmas that are displayed in actual booktalk practices. The examples are extracted from video-re-

cordings of such interactions. When I studied the tapes, I identified different problems in the practical accomplishment of ideal book-talk.

Method

Setting and participants

The school studied, the Valley school – a municipal elementary school in a medium-large Swedish town – has worked with reading support at all levels for ten years. As an obligatory part of the regular curriculum, the school runs *book clubs* (Swed. *läsecirklar*) in grades 4 through 7. I received permission from teachers and pupils to, during one school year, video-record the book clubs (3 sessions/group) for 8 different groups representing 4 classes (grades 4–7, e.g. pupils aged 10–14); that is, in total 24 book club sessions. Each session lasted about 30 minutes. Forty pupils (20 girls and 20 boys) and 5 teachers (4 women and 1 man) participated. However, it is the booktalk practices in which these persons participate that constitute the analytic units of this study. All names are changed in order to maintain the participants anonymity.

Recordings

The data of the present study consist of video-recordings of 24 teacher-led book club interactions. However, due to technical mistakes the recordings lack sound in three cases (5A:1, 5B:2 and 6A:1). In all, I have thus transcribed 21 book sessions.

The primary rationale for choosing video-recording was that it facilitated separating the pupils' voices from one another. Also, it was possible to study participants' non-verbal responses and initiatives.

At the actual filming, I tried to place the camera unobtrusively yet at a spot from which the camera would cover all participants.

Book club routines

The book clubs at the Valley school were primarily inspired by Chambers' booktalk approach. Chambers warns the reader about "[e]xclusively repetitious reading of one kind of book, of any one writer" (1993/1999, p. 13). He argues that a person who reads in this way becomes simpleminded. To avoid repetitious reading, the enabling adult should help children to read with variation. According to Chambers, the method for accomplishing this makes it possible to listen to what others say about books and to speak your mind about books (Chambers, 1993/1999, pp. 12–14).

Another main source of inspiration of the book clubs at the Valley school was the reading development schedule (Swed. läsutvecklingsschemat, LUS) created by Sundblad, Dominković and Allard (1983, pp. 58–64). They claim that children at a certain level of reading skill limit their reading to one type of books. Their 23-point-model can be summed up in three main stages. During the first stage, children tend to be omnivorous; in a second stage (the 18th point) they tend to favour one specific genre, reading only one type of book (e.g. horse books, mystery stories, fantasy); the third stage involves reading of different types of texts (i.e., fiction, non-fiction, newspapers) as well as different genres within each type. The second level is sometimes referred to as the "age of book devouring" (Swed. bokslukaråldern). According to Sundblad, Dominković, and Allard's definition of this period, the child reads a great deal *but* is limited to one genre. This stage is assumed (by Sundblad, Dominković and Allard) to be crucial in children's reading, and therefore it is important that teachers and parents assist children in developing beyond one chosen genre. According to the authors, it is important both to assist children to get *into* this book devouring stage, *and* to guide them out of it by offering variation in genres to read; that is, facilitating a move into the third and more educated stage. In this matter, the reasoning of Sundblad, Dominković and Allard is thus congenial with that of Chambers.

In the following, the usual procedure of the studied book clubs will be described. The teacher-librarian introduced the book clubs in the classes some time before the book clubs actually started. She took some time from an ordinary lesson in each class, presenting 7–8 book titles to the pupils. The books presented were assumed by the teacher-librarian to be popular for the ages concerned, that is, 10–14 years of age. 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 of how the groups were arranged. But the groups should also make it possible for the pupils to fulfil the school's goals of the activity; that is, to express feelings and thoughts evoked by literature. Therefore, the teacher-librarian co-operated with the class teacher and the remedial teacher – who knew the pupils' reading skills better than the teacher-librarian – in their assignment into 4–6 groups of 3–8 pupils per group according to the pupils' first book choices. If several pupils chose the same book or if a child chose a book seen as too easy or difficult, the second, third or fourth choice served as a basis for the organisation of the groups.

When it was time for the first book club sessions, the groups spread out in different locations in the school, so that each group could discuss their book in tranquillity. The teacher leading the book club and the group of pupils were seated around a table, in the library or in a small room for group activities. Thus, the teacher was not fronting the room in a traditional hierarchical manner. In fact, the groups often tended to literally form book “circles” in that they were seated around relatively circular (or squarish) tables.

Every book 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. S/he talked about the author, and what the story was about. Also, the pupils were asked about

why they had chosen the book in question and what their expectations were. This first book club session also came to be an opportunity for the pupils to present themselves in relation to reading. Some presented themselves as “devourers of books” (Swed. bokslukare), for example Inga in grade 4: ‘and I like thick books’, and Sune in grade 6 ‘I love to read’. Jane in grade 6 presented herself as a horse book reader: ‘I read only horse books he he there are only horse books on my bookshelf’. According to these presentations, a number of the pupils could be interpreted as stage II readers in Sundblad et al.’s scheme, or – using Chambers’ vocabulary – repetitious readers of a special kind of book, excluding all other genres. That is, exactly the type of readers that Chambers suggests should be challenged by an enabling adult to broaden their reading (1993/1999, p. 13).

During this first book club session, the initial part of the book was read. Either the teacher read aloud, or the pupils took turns reading aloud. It also happened that the pupils read quietly; sometimes two or all of these alternatives occurred in the same group. At the end of the first book club session the teacher distributed an information sheet about the “book club fortnight”, a reminder of what the pupils had been told (for example, that the group members should gather for a second meeting one week later). As a preparation for this session, the pupils should have read the first half of the book and completed grade-specific tasks at home, such as identifying the main characters of the book. After yet another week the third and last session, with the final report of the whole book, was held.

Additionally, the pupils in grade 4 were expected to read aloud and start writing reading reports. The pupils in grade 5 were to practice writing summaries and those in grade 6 were to practice writing reviews as well as summaries. The pupils in grade 7 were to write reviews. The tasks fulfilled would be presented in the class after the completion of the book club sessions.

Transcriptions

In order to investigate the interactions in which, according to Chambers, talk is the most essential part, the entire book club conversations were transcribed. Since the focus of the analysis is not the linguistic details in the utterances, I have followed Per Linell's (1994, pp. 10–11, 14) recommendations and established a base transcription. The transcriptions cover overlaps, emphasis, loudness, pauses, and prolongation of sounds and latching.³

Translation

A native English-speaking professional translator has translated the extracts in collaboration with the author.

Using discourse analysis for analysis

Potter and Wetherell (1995, p. 86) argue in favour of an *in extenso* transcription instead of only transcribing the interesting parts of a research material. The researcher is advised to make analytical notes during the transcription since ideas often appear as early as this initial stage (Potter, 1998, p. 136). I have followed this recommendation and made an *in extenso* transcription of all book club sessions. Yet, as regards the degree of detail, I have settled with a rough base level as Linell (1994) suggests. I indexed the material from these rough transcriptions and repeated viewing of the videotapes. The indices, along with further re-reading of the rough transcriptions and repeated videotape viewing, helped me choose sequences to transcribe more closely. For the purposes of the present study the choice was guided by the following principles (Potter, 1998, pp. 136–137; Potter & Wetherell, 1994): *variation*, since I found that the teachers talked about reading and time planning in quite different ways. Yet all discussed when to read, how much to read, and about how to only discuss parts of the book that everyone had read. When dilemmas were chosen as the focus of the present study, issues of *accountability* became interest-

ing. Do the teachers display that they experience dilemmas? If so, are these dilemmas accounted for?

Since the present study is an instance of interdisciplinary work, the appeal of Potter and Wetherell to perform *cross-referring* becomes obvious. For instance, both literary sources and social theory are drawn upon throughout the analysis.

Coding of dilemmas

The entire body of material was scrutinised in terms of “How does the teacher organise reading?” For the purpose of this paper, I limited myself to one aspect of booktalk practices, analysing problems around the practical accomplishment of the booktalk goals. During repeated viewing of the tapes, I found several points at which the participants demonstrated dissatisfaction, and in line with Billig et al. (1988), these problems could be described as dilemmas.

Two overarching booktalk dilemmas will be treated in this article. They are:

- 1) Is it possible to structure (i.e., to some extent imposing control over the pupils) reading without interfering with the pupils’ reading for pleasure, that indicates choice of when and how much to read at a time?
- 2) Is it possible to organise literary experience in a school context without “destroying” it by simultaneously running other parallel school projects? School is an inherently educational environment, and it is perhaps not easy for teachers to bracket other educational aims.

In a second reading of the transcribed material, I looked for all instances in which the participants (teacher and/or pupil) discussed the organisation of reading, searching for all instances in which the participants oriented their conversations toward the two dilemmas.

Children's calendars versus reading for pleasure

In Swedish schools today, there is a common understanding that children should read a little every day. This notion – reading books as bits or pieces – is extremely common, but there is not a single authoritative source for it. One important source, however, is the earlier mentioned project addressing a reading developing schedule (Swed. läsutvecklingsschemat, LUS), which has been obligatory reading in the teacher program at several Swedish universities during the last years (Sundblad *et al.*, 1983). As a consequence, many active teachers in Swedish schools today have come in contact with this model.

Chambers similarly promotes reading as a daily school activity for children up to 16 years of age (Chambers, 1991/1996, p. 37), specifying different time dosage goals for different age periods: children aged 7 years should read at least 15 minutes with 1–2 sessions a day; at 9 years they should read 30 minutes per session; and at 13 years 40–45 minutes (1991/1996, p. 38). However, Chambers fails to explain how these age-related dosages were defined and the gains in applying them. In the present material, matters concerning “time dosages” were discussed in all eight groups at some point.

The first empirical extract is an example of how the discussions around planning of reading could take place. It presents an example of talk on division of reading; on how the pages of the book should be distributed across the week in days and minutes. In the conversation preceding this extract, the teacher told the pupils that they had to read half the book before the next book club session a week later. She reminded them that they had already been informed about this when the teacher-librarian first presented the book club activity and the books involved. Moreover, the teacher in question knew that some of the children had older siblings who had already participated in book clubs. As an additional reminder, the teacher distributed the above mentioned information sheet

containing information about the “book club fortnight”. One point was that the pupils should plan their reading according to the discussions during the first book club session, and that they were expected to have read about half the book before the following session. Another point was that they should have finished the book at the time of the final book club session. The teacher also told the pupils that she expected them to read up to page 91 in preparation for the next book club session. So when the extract starts, pages 1–91 are considered to constitute the first half of the target book.

[1]

Group 4A:1.** Participants: Inga, Mats, Bert, Tony, and MARY (teacher).
Book: *Hjälp! Boan är lös!*⁴ by Monica Zak (1987/1989). (Tape 1: 0.20.47.)

1. MARY: then it's like this you see when you (.) read at home it's really good if you plan to sit and read 'cause this is your homework (.) and then you can think about (.) this evening (5) °(x) write first°
2. Inga?: °yeah°
3. MARY: (7) this evening is a homework evening right
4. Bert: uh huh
5. MARY: then we do our [homework
6. Mats: [football ev-
7. MARY: yes
8. Mats: I'm going to football
9. MARY: uh huh
10. Inga: but we don't have any homework today
11. MARY: then you can think like this that when you don't have any homework it can be pretty good to begin (.) tomorrow is Thursday then (.) Friday Saturday Sunday and then maybe you don't want to read but then you may do it
12. Mats: [it's Thursday today]
13. Tony: [tomorrow's Friday]
14. MARY: right it's Thursday (.) what did I want then?
15. Several: he he

16. MARY: I thought it was still Wednesday yes Thursday this evening you read then you have Monday Tuesday and Wednesday evening (.) if we say it's four <school-day evenings> so to speak and if we see that we're on page 11 now and should read [to page] 91
17. Mats: [80 pages]
18. MARY: that's about 80 pages
19. Mats: that is 80 pages
20. MARY: and then we have four evenings (.) about how much should you read then?
21. Mats: 10 pages every evening
22. MARY: then you've read 40 pages
23. Mats: oh right it's 20 pages
24. MARY: <about> (.) if you've played football one evening or are out and don't think you'll have time to read then you have to read a little more
25. Mats: I have football twice a week and then so-
26. MARY: but really (.) Mats (.) your football you don't play it from the moment you come home till you go to bed
27. Mats: till six-thirty
28. MARY: so then you can read when you come home (.) so that you know that- it's about 20 pages (.) four days but if you want to read more one day and less another that's fine and if you want to read on Saturday and Sunday you can do that
29. Inga: [can we read-]
30. Tony: [can we read] beyond 91?
31. MARY: sure you can
32. Mats: (x)
33. MARY: but- (.) next time we'll only discuss about up to 91
34. Mats: should we write (x)?
35. MARY: right what should you do then? if we look at the sheet that we adults have written to help you all a bit-
36. Bert: °you can (x) read 10 in the morning and 10 in the evening°
37. MARY: right you can do that! that was really a good idea Bert [had (.)-]
38. Inga: [ya know you can-]
39. MARY: 10 pages in the morning and 10 in the evening

40. Inga: if you read to 91 do you have to keep reading?
41. MARY: no no no it's just to 91
42. Inga: then you can read another book
43. MARY: °sure you can°

** Group 4A:1 = grade 4, group A, session 1.

At the beginning of this sequence, the teacher accentuates that it is 'really good' (Swed. 'väldigt bra') that one *plans* the reading (turn 1). Thereafter she begins to discuss how such a planning can be formed. First the teacher, so to speak, makes an inventory of time by enumerating the days when the pupils can read: Thursday, Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday are reading days since they are 'school-day evenings', (Swed. 'skoldagskvällar') (turn 16). Thereafter she presents a subtraction task: if the goal is 91 pages to go from 11 pages (she had read 11 pages aloud for the group) – how many pages remain for the pupils to read during the coming week (turn 16)? Mats answers '80 pages' (turn 17). The teacher reformulates his answer to 'that's about 80 pages' (in turn 18), but he then corrects her, focusing on the fact that *exactly* 80 pages remain, not *around* 80: 'that is 80 pages' (Swed. 'det är 80 sidor') (turn 19).

In this case, the booktalk dilemma involves conflict of interests. The pupils' reading of the selected book during one fortnight entails homework on top of the regular curriculum. Thus, the teacher interferes with the pupils' spare time. In the present example, the teacher takes into consideration the pupils' spare-time activities (turn 24). However, it is not legitimate to *skip* homework reading because of other activities. The teacher teaches the pupils how to plan homework and still do spare-time activities.

We can also note the teacher's enthusiastic response to Bert's suggestion (turn 36) that one may read 10 pages in the morning and 10 in the evening. She immediately takes up Bert's suggestion as a good and desirable example of how to arrange reading in two daily doses. Since the teacher wants the pupils to plan ahead concerning their reading she is obviously thrilled by Bert's suggestion, which is the first creative pupil suggestion along a teacher's line of thinking.

This piece of interaction is all about a teacher's attempt to impose some sort of control over the pupils' time, and spare time at that (cf. Hustler & Payne, 1982). At the same time she works at making it clear that she is not pursuing a *total* control of the spare time – rather that as long as the work gets done the pupils are free to distribute the work (turn 20). The teacher orients towards this dilemma by, on the one hand, imposing control upon the pupils' spare time but on the other, making it clear that there is a certain amount of freedom within their reading planning as well. The teacher's enthusiastic acceptance of Bert's suggestion – which makes *him* instead of her the regulator of his classmates' spare time – supports the interpretation that the teacher orients towards this dilemma.

One could assume that the phenomenon of detailed planning of reading only occurs among younger pupils, but in the collected data such planning takes place at all levels. Actually, in the initial session of all transcribed group sessions (i.e., 4A, 4B, 5B, 6B, 7A and 7B) there is indeed always a sequence about how to divide the pages of the book into suitable doses. An explanation for this could be that it is not just about planning, but rather control of time.

The time control aspect might also be the reason the teachers spend so much time discussing with the pupils how to plan their reading. It can be noted that planning is also an important issue on the information sheet distributed in the book clubs. Normally, all pupils in grades 5–7 have participated in book clubs since grade 4, so they should be able to plan their reading. In this school, the staff had worked with book clubs for 10 years. It is, of course, not impossible that the teachers have had the experience that Swedish 10-year-olds cannot finish a book in a fortnight without their teacher implementing a reading routine for them.

Reading as a synchronised activity and reading for pleasure

The collected material also revealed another dilemma. If some, but not all, pupils have read more, or perhaps even finished the entire book before the second book club session, a great deal of time will be spent on what can and can not be said about the text since everyone has not read the same amount of the story. In fact, in the second session of the transcribed group sessions (i.e., 4A, 4B, 5A, 6A, 6B, 7A and 7B), all but one (i.e., 4A) contained a sequence in which the synchrony was discussed.

Group A in grade 7 were told during the first book club session that they could read more than the prescribed amount of pages, but that they would not discuss the latter half of the book during the second session. The teacher explicitly reminded them to keep apart the two “halves” of the book, in order not to reveal the ending.

[2]

Group 7A:2. Participants: Åsa, Eva, Anja, and MARY (teacher).

Book: *Isnatt* by Steinar Sørllø (1989). (Tape 6: 0.07.50.)

1. Anja: he's well brave then in the end you could s [ay but (xx)]
2. MARY: [yes but we're
not] talking ((Taps with two fingers on Anja's arm and
smiles.)) about the en [d yet]
3. Anja: [yeah I] know
that, that was what I [thought (xx)] ((Waves with one
open hand towards the teacher.))
4. MARY: [yes that's] good! he he ((Smiles.))
5. Anja: (x) like I can't say it so: ((Smiles.))
6. MARY: no (.) but during the first part of the book we see in a way
that Kjell wants to take responsibility 'cause (.) he was
maybe indirectly a bit responsible for them ending up
there?

7. Anja: he seems to know a lot and then he says to the others that
(.) like (.) (xx) ((Hits the table with her hand.)) on the ice
so it doesn't break for example he said to Leif didn't he
once I think so like he like (.) aeh well you could say
(...) ((1.18 minutes omitted.))
8. Anja: but then in the end but we won't tell that
9. MARY: <we won't tell that now we'll look at it next week!> if we
look at Leif now he also had guilt feelings 'cause he was
the one who'd gone further out (.) how does he develop
during the first part of this book?
10. Anja: I don't really know if Eva's read this far now but like he
was gonna (.) like (1) you know he was gonna jump out
like this-
11. Eva: on the ice? get-
12. Anja: yeah
13. Eva: the bag
14. Anja: yeah
15. MARY: uh huh
16. Anja: it was there I wanted-
17. MARY: uh huh
18. Anja: then he showed ya know that
19. MARY: uh huh
20. Eva: but it's well
21. Anja: can I say it now then
22. MARY: uh huh
23. Eva: shu ((Breathes out deeply as from relief and giggles.))
24. Anja: I'm not really sure about it
25. MARY: he he yes
26. Anja: I read the whole thing the first day so then
27. MARY: yes

At the time of the second book club session, two of the three participating pupils – Anja and Åsa – have read the entire book, while the third one Eva has followed the teacher's directions and only read half the book. At the beginning of this extract Anja refers to the end of the story (turn 1). The teacher immediately interrupts her, reminding her that 'we're not talking about the end yet' (Swed. 'vi ska inte prata slutet än') (turn 2). Her initial discount 'yes but'

(Swed. 'jamen') suggests that she refers to something that is already part of the group's shared information. Also, Anja confirms that she is aware of this and that she had indeed thought about it (turn 3).

I interpret the teacher's interruption in combination with her touching Anja's arm as a reprimand. The preceding smile indicates a mitigation of that reprimand. A problematic point here is that the teacher has exercised a sort of quasi-control over the pupils: she has decided that they only should talk about the first half of the book, while at the same time she has allowed them to read more than the first half. Thus, there is a dilemma in the book club. A dilemma such as this could be avoided if the teacher either takes full control over what to read and discuss, or lets the pupils' spontaneous reading conduct what to discuss.

The fact that Anja has read more than Eva has, also becomes the subject for discussion later in the extract. The next time Anja has a comment, she opens with a question about how far in the book Eva has reached (turn 10). The following 17 turns refer to this asymmetry (turns 11–27).

As pointed out, the same problem – that is, a lack of synchrony in terms of text read – occurred in almost all the second book club sessions. The pupils thus not only had to recall the specific story involved, but also had to keep account of whether an event took place in the first or the second “half” of the book. Normally there is no indication that the first “half” is a unity in itself. The rationale behind the teachers' decision to discuss the first half of the book was to help the children get through the story by making a stop *en route*.

Without doubt, there is an educational dilemma involved in group reading in that it is not easy to discuss a book if the group participants have not taken part in the same text units.

Other school projects versus reading projects

All circle leaders except one worked as teachers at the time of the study. As teachers they had to handle many different educational goals. Goals that surface in the present material are vocabulary knowledge, skills in reading aloud, and review writing.

It can be added that none of the five reasons for reading aloud that Sundblad, Dominković and Allard (1983, pp. 43–44) present indicates that reading aloud should promote joyful reading. Reading aloud is, for instance, seen as something that gives speech support to the learner reader, promotes the feeling of competence in the learner reader, paves the way to a concentrated reading, and facilitates the transmission of a message. It also makes it possible for the teacher to check the learner reader's skills. To Chambers, *hearing* someone reading aloud is an essential part of reading.

The main goal of the book club is, I would surmise, at times, contradictory to a number of other educational goals. The book clubs aim at a personal joyful reading experience at different degrees of difficulty, without performance anxiety. This would perhaps be more easily attained if other achievement goals would be kept out of book club sessions. If other skills are tested during book club sessions, the joyful experience is disconnected. The following sequences show how competing educational goals might hinder the reading experience.

Vocabulary lessons and reading for pleasure

In order to understand a literary text (this of course applies to any text), it is essential to comprehend all parts, that is, all words that together make the text a unit. The following is an example of when literary experience (pupils' freedom) is subordinated to the ordinary school goal of testing both pupils' vocabulary knowledge and their memory (teachers' control).

[3]

Group 4B:2. Participants: Julia, Sara, Mia, Ida, Dan, and SUE (teacher).
Book: *Smuggelkatten* by Lasse Ekholm (1990). (Tape 3: 0.40.54.)

1. SUE: ri:ght and that money what did she use it for?
2. Sara: for the c [at]
3. Mia: [-at]
4. SUE: yeah for what then for the cat? for buying food?
5. Sara: no for- what's it called what's it called for putting it in-
6. Julia: °quarantine°
7. Sara: it in quaractine for three months
8. Dan?: °four°
9. SUE: wha— what was it called? tha— that you said it so well
Julia?
10. Julia: °quarantine°
11. SUE: quarantine (.) what is quarantine then? ((Sara and Mia
raise their hands to answer.))
12. Sara: it's like-
13. SUE: Mia
14. Mia: it's like (.) that uh we:ll what do you say (.)((Dan raises
his hand.)) it's (.) I mean you could say it's (.) we:ll °what
do you say I can't say it right°
15. SUE: you don't want to? What about Dan?
16. Dan: you get shots and tests and then well (.) you sit in a cages
17. SUE: right (.) why do they have to do that? ((Sara and Mia
raise their hands to answer.))
18. Sara: >I know<
19. SUE: >I know< Ida?
20. Ida: ((Who has not raised her hand to answer, shakes her
head.))
21. SUE: no:e what about Sara?
22. Sara: well it's like that the ca- if they have a disease they can
bring it with them and infect all other animals (.) in
Sweden so those animals get the same disease and that's
not so good
23. SUE: no no (.) was that what you were going to say Mia?
24. Mia: yes

25. SUE: uh huh and that's why he had to sit in this quarantine and that's what cost so much money (.) uh huh (.) and then she was well- then she thought it was so- more important to pay for the cat than to buy that horse
26. Mia: uh huh
27. SUE: uh huh

In the book club sequence above, the teacher first asks some questions as if she does not know the story herself (turns 1, 4). Chambers warns us about this type of book discussion, which he compares with an interrogation (1993/1999, pp.48–49). When asked to recall a specific event in the book, Sara hesitates, trying to find the right word (turn 5). During Sara's time for reflection, Julia breaks in and whispers 'quarantine' (Swed. 'karantän') (turn 6). Right after, Sara re-takes the turn but makes a slip of the tongue, 'quaractine' (Swed. 'karatären') (turn 7). The teacher asks Julia to repeat the correct word (turn 9), which she does, however still in a whispering manner (turn 10). As if to reassure herself that the correct pronunciation of the unusual word is noted by all the pupils, the teacher repeats it yet again and poses the question 'what is quarantine then?' (Swed. 'vad är en karantän då?') (turn 11). Sara, who did not pronounce the word correctly, begins to answer the question but is interrupted by the teacher who calls on Mia (who raises her hand to volunteer to answer) (turn 12 and 13). Yet Mia does not know the answer, and the teacher then calls on Dan and Sara to explain why quarantine is needed. The teacher's final contributions can be seen, as a kind of other-oriented face saving (of Mia), as she suggests that Mia really knew this all along (turns 23 and 25). The teacher here orients towards the dilemmatic situation of interrogating the pupils during an alleged free discussion about reading experiences, in her attempt to mitigate the questioning of Mia by offering her this face saving. Thereby, Mia's peers are not cast as the ultimate authorities on the meaning of quarantine.

It is possible that the two pupils, Sara and Julia, construe the situation as an interrogation where the purpose is to give the teacher the desired answer. On top of the vocabulary lesson, one could, therefore, also interpret some of the teacher's questions as testing the pupils' memories, or if they have read the book as far as they should. This could be a necessary pedagogical task for all kinds of purposes, but Chambers claims that it is devastating for literary discussions (1993/1999, pp. 45–46). At its extreme, education like this could become an ongoing interrogation where the pupils have to find *the* right answers to what the teacher has in mind. To avoid this, Chambers suggests that talk about reading should be based on an agreement that everything is *honourably reportable*. Honourably reportable implies that what is said will not be misused in any way, and that everyone will be listened to and respected. The teacher's questions are legitimate from the point of view that one should understand the parts to understand the whole. The problem is that the teacher in the example above puts Sara – who first used the word quarantine – in rather a bad spot since she in fact first failed to pronounce it, and then in the first run to explain it.

Reading aloud and reading for pleasure

In grade 4, an additional task for the children was to individually choose an extract from the text. According to the information sheet about the book club, the chosen part should consist of about half a page. At home, the child should practice reading the chosen text aloud. During the second book club session, the pupils read their chosen texts aloud to one another and presented the motivation for why they chose that particular part.

[4]

Group 4B:3. Participants: Julia, Sara, Mia, Ida, Dan, and SUE (teacher).
Book: *Smuggelkatten* by Lasse Ekholm (1990). (Tape 4: 0.10.16.)

1. SUE: what page do you want to read then (.) Sara?
2. Sara: (xx) here hum 80
3. SUE: page 80
4. Dan: <do: we [have to read]>?
5. Sara: [>but I'm not gonna read] a whole page<
6. SUE: no- well everyone has to read (.) and which page have you chosen then Dan?
7. Dan: 46
8. SUE: uh huh and uh Ida?
9. Ida: 46
10. SUE: 46 too (.) and Mia?
11. Mia: yes 27
12. SUE: oh that's good that someone else was earlier too and Julia?
13. Julia: 46
14. SUE: 46 you too? what's so exciting on page 46 then? this is mysterious! I'll have to-
15. Dan: but it's no fun if everybody
16. Mia: no it isn't
17. Dan: no
18. SUE: no it's not so great but what can I do about it?
19. Dan: well then I don't want to read first
20. SUE: no but you see it's that now you've all practised these things
21. Ida: ° but I °-
22. Sara: bu- but I [can read first]
23. SUE: [but page 46] that's not enough to read
24. Dan: yeah
25. Sara: no
26. SUE: no
27. Sara: it's just a little bit
28. SUE: I said at least half a page we decided (.) and I'm actually beginning to wonder a little (.) if it's really the case that-
29. Dan: °but I haven't (x)°
30. Ida: °then I'll take 49°
31. SUE: that Julia and Ida had decided on 46

In this group, one could detect actions of resistance towards the task of reading aloud in that some pupils chose to read the shortest page in the book (page 46). In a declaration of her intention not to read an entire page (turn 5), Sara in fact expresses explicit resistance. The implicit resistance of Dan consists of having chosen the shortest page in the book (turn 7). Similarly, Ida (turn 9) and Julia (turn 13) have chosen the same (very short) page as Dan. Mia complies with the assignment though, in that she has chosen a “normal” page, page 27. Sara tries to please the teacher by offering to read first (turn 22). Also, Sara aligns with the teacher in her challenge of the choice of reading page 46, ‘it’s just a little bit’ (‘det är ju bara lite’) (turn 27). When the teacher (turn 28) objects that page 46 does not fulfil the request of being at least half a page, Ida tries to negotiate with the teacher, offering to read from page 49 (turn 30).

A problem with the reading aloud task is that the pupils have a “free” choice of text, but that it should in fact fulfil two additional conditions: it should be a text of proper length and it should not be the same text as that of another pupil – thus, progressive pedagogy framed by traditional pedagogy. The teacher’s rather resigned utterance that, despite her dislike, she can not do anything about the fact that several pupils have chosen the same text extract to read, expresses an orientation towards an educational dilemma (turn 18). She doesn’t like the result of the freedom. Yet, she restrains herself from using her power as a teacher and exercising complete control over the situation. This could be interpreted in terms of dilemma.

The dichotomy of freedom versus control is also at play later in the extract when the teacher in fact uses her power and disqualifies the choice to read page 46 (turn 23). She even extends her control and throws suspicion on Julia and Ida for not revealing their true choices (turn 31).

In the other grade 4 group, however, there was no displayed resistance, and the children did choose “lengthy-enough” pages

(e.g., at least half a page according to the information sheet and the instructions during the first book club session).

Concluding discussion

Without somehow suggesting that all children should become authors, I would like to discuss some examples of great reading experience from the universe of authors. As far as I know, there is no autobiographic report on childhood reading according to a time schedule among authors. By contrast, many authors, when recollecting great reading experiences from their childhood, recount how they were totally immersed in reading – hour after hour – forgetting time and place. One example is Astrid Lindgren (1984). Lev Tolstoj describes in his autobiographical work, *Childhood* (1958?? [Detstvo, originally published in 1852]) how he eagerly devoted a childhood summer to reading French novels. That particular summer Tolstoj read about one hundred novels. Vacation reading was also a preferred activity of the young Marcel Proust. In *Sur la lecture* (1988 [originally written as a preface in 1905]), he depicts himself as a boy who could read for hours and became annoyed when reminded of the world around him. In his memoirs, *Confieso que he vivido: memorias* (1974), Pablo Neruda confesses how his literary “gluttony” was well known at the local library during his childhood. Neruda compares himself when young with an ostrich that devoured everything indiscriminately, from Ibsen to Buffalo Bill, as he eagerly read night and day.

An implication of reader-response theories (for example Fish, 1980/1998; Iser, 1978b) is the importance of the reader’s own interpretation of a text; thus, reading includes a creative component. There is not much written about reading for pleasure, but there seems to be an in-built contradiction in making a creative activity such as reading into an everyday dosage.

I have shown how values such as freedom and constraint are at stake in the studied book clubs. In terms of reading, the conflict is

between the pupils' freedom to read for their own delight and the teachers' educational task to control the pupils' reading activity. It is also important to separate reading *skills* from reading for *pleasure* (cf. the use of Sundblad et al. in the studied bookclubs). Thus, theories and models of reading skill development are not of necessity applicable on development of reading for pleasure. Daily reading according to a schedule can perhaps be profitable in developing reading *habits* but there is, as far as I know, no solid evidence that it is good for the joyful reading *experience*.

Acknowledgements

I owe thanks to Karin Aronsson, Jakob Cromdal, the editors and two anonymous reviewers for helpful comments on an earlier manuscript for this article. Financial support from The Bank of Sweden Tercentenary Foundation (grant 1999-0341: 01-02) is gratefully acknowledged.

Notes

1. The word "authentic" is here used in the sense ongoing, already-occurring activities, as opposed to situations that are constructed or initiated by researchers.

2. School settings are part of most children's everyday real-life.

3. The transcription symbols are based on Edwards (1997):

[] Square brackets mark the start and end of overlapping speech.

Underlining Signals emphasis; the extent of underlining within individual words locates emphasis.

◦ ◦ Quieter speech.

(4) Measure pauses in seconds.

(.) Micropause.

((Text.)) Transcriber's comments.

: Prolongation of preceding sound.

> < Speeded-up talk.

< > Slower talk.

– Utterance interrupted or ebbed away.

(. . .) Talk has been omitted from a data extract.

(x) (xx) Inaudible word or words.

he he Laughter.

4. Titles of fiction are not translated.

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Appendix Swedish originals

[1]

Group 4A:1. Participants: Inga, Mats, Bert, Tony, and MARY (teacher).

Book: *Hjälp! Boan är lös* by Monica Zak. (Tape 1: 0.20.47.)

1. MARY: då är det ju så här att när man ska (.) läsa hemma så är det väldigt bra att man planerar sitt läsande för det här är ju en läxa som ni har (.) och då kan man ju fundera på (.) i kväll (5) °x skriva först°
2. Inga?: °jo°
3. MARY: (7) i kväll är läxkväll va

4. Bert: m:
5. MARY: då ska man läsa [läxor
6. Mats: [fotbolls-
7. MARY: ja
8. Mats: jag ska på fotboll
9. MARY: um
10. Inga: men vi har inga läxor i dag
11. MARY: då kan man ju tänka så här att har man inga läxor så kan
det ju vara ganska bra att starta upp (.) i morgon är det
torsdag sen (.) fredag lördag söndag och då kanske man
inte vill läsa men det får man ju göra
12. Mats: [det är torsdag i dag]
13. Tony: [i morgon är det fredag]
14. MARY: det är torsdag ja (.) vad ville jag ha då?
15. Flera: hihi
16. MARY: jag trodde det var onsdag fortfarande ja torsdag i kväll
läser man sen har ni måndag tisdag och onsdag kväll (.)
om vi säger att det är fyra så att säga <skoldagskvällar>
och om man då tänker sig att man är på sidan 11 nu och
ska läsa [till sidan] 91
17. Mats: [80 sidor]
18. MARY: det är ungefär 80 sidor
19. Mats: det är 80 sidor
20. MARY: och sen har man fyra kvällar (.) hur mycket ungefär ska
man läsa då?
21. Mats: 10 sidor varje kväll
22. MARY: då har man läst 40 sidor
23. Mats: ja just det 20 sidor vart det
24. MARY: <ungefär> (.) är det då så att man spelat fotboll nån kväll
eller man ska bort och man inte tycker att man hinner
och läsa då måste man ju läsa lite längre
25. Mats: jag kör fotboll två gånger i veckan och sen så-
26. MARY: jag menar (.) Mats (.) den här fotbollen den spelar du inte
från det du kommer hem till du går och lägger dig
27. Mats: till halv sju
28. MARY: så då kan man läsa när man kommer hem (.) så att ni vet
det- att ungefär 20 sidor (.) fyra dagar men vill man läsa
mera nån dag och mindre nån dag så går det ju bra och
vill man läsa lördag och söndag så kan man göra det

29. Inga: [får man läsa-]
30. Tony: [får man läsa] längre än 91?
31. MARY: det får man göra
32. Mats: (x)
33. MARY: men- (.) nästa gång så kommer vi bara och prata om ungefär fram till 91
34. Mats: ska man skriva x?
35. MARY: ja vad ska man göra då? om vi tittar på det här pappret som vi vuxna har skrivit för att ni ska ha lite hjälp-
36. Bert: °man kan x läsa 10 på morronen och 10 på kvällen°
37. MARY: det kan man göra du! det var ju en bra idé som Bert [hade (.)-]
38. Inga: [man kan ju-]
39. MARY: -10 sidor på morronen och 10 på kvällen
40. Inga: om man läser till 91 måste man fortsätta och läsa då?
41. MARY: nej nej nej det är bara till 91
42. Inga: då kan man ju läsa ur nån annan bok
43. MARY: °visst kan man göra det°

[2]

Group 7A:2. Participants: Åsa, Eva, Anja, and MARY (teacher).

Book: *Isnatt* by Steinar Sørllø. (Tape 6: 0.07.50.)

1. Anja: han är ju modig sen i slutet kan man ju s [äga men (xx)]
2. MARY: [jamen vi ska
inte] prata ((Petar med två fingrar på Anjas arm, och ler.))
slut [et än]
3. Anja: [ja jag] vet det, det var det jag [tänkte (xx)]
((”Wobblar” med en öppen hand mot läraren.))
4. MARY: [ja det är] bra! hihi
((Ler.))
5. Anja: (x) kan jag ju inte säga det så:å ((Ler.))
6. MARY: näe (.) men under den första delen av boken märker man på nåt sätt och vis att Kjell vill ta ansvar för att (.) han var ju kanske indirekt lite ansvarig för att dom hade hamnat där?

7. Anja: han verkar ju veta mycket och då säger han till dom andra så här (.) typ (.) (xx) ((Slår med handen på bordet.)) på isen så att den inte spricker till exempel så han väl till Leif nån gång tror jag så här att han liksom (.) aeh om man säger
(...) ((1.18 minuter borttagna.))
8. Anja: fast sen i slutet men det säger vi inte
9. MARY: <det säger vi inte nu det tittar vi på nästa vecka!> om vi tittar på Leif då. Han hade ju också skuldkänslor för att han då hade varit den som drivit längre ut (.) hur utvecklas han under första delen i den här boken?
10. Anja: jag vet inte riktigt om om Eva hunnit så där långt nu men som att han skulle (.) så här (1) ni vet han skulle hoppa ut så här-
11. Eva: på isen? hämta
12. Anja: ja
13. Eva: väskan?
14. Anja: ja
15. MARY: um
16. Anja: det var dä jag ville-
17. MARY: um
18. Anja: då visa han ju dä
19. MARY: um
20. Eva: men det är ju
21. Anja: kan jag säga det nu då
22. MARY: um
23. Eva: shu ((Andas ut djupt som av lättnad. Fnitrar.))
24. Anja: jag har inte riktigt koll på det
25. MARY: hihi ja
26. Anja: jag läste ut den första dan så då
27. MARY: ja

[3]

Group 4B:2. Participants: Julia, Sara, Mia, Ida, Dan, and SUE (teacher).

Book: *Smuggelkatten* by Lasse Ekholm. (Tapes 3: 0.40.54.)

1. SUE: ja: och dom pengarna vad använde hon dom till?
2. Sara: till katt [en]
3. Mia: [-en]
4. SUE: ja vaddå då till katten? till och köpa mat för?
5. Sara: ne:j till att- vad heter det vad heter det till att lägga in-
6. Julia: °karantän°
7. Sara: -den på karatären i tre månader
8. Dan?: °fyra°
9. SUE: va- vad hette det här? de- det kunde du säga så bra Julia?
10. Julia: °karantän.°
11. SUE: karantän (.) vad är en karantän då? ((Sara och Mia räcker upp handen.))
12. Sara: det är som-
13. SUE: Mia
14. Mia: det är som (.) att ä- ja: vad ska man säga (.) ((Dan räcker upp handen.)) det är (.) jag menar om man säger så här att (.) ja: °vad ska man säga jag kan inte säga klart°
15. SUE: vill du inte det? Dan då?
16. Dan: man får ta sprutor och prov och sen så (.) man sitter i en burar
17. SUE: ja (.) varför får dom göra det? ((Sara och Mia räcker upp handen.))
18. Sara: >jag vet<
19. SUE: >ja vet< Ida?
20. Ida: ((Som inte har räckt upp handen, skakar på huvudet.))
21. SUE: nä:e Sara då?
22. Sara: ja det är så att den ka- ifall dom har nån sjukdom så kan dom ta med sig den och smitta alla andra djuren (.) i Sverige så att dom djuren får samma sjukdom men det är inte så bra
23. SUE: nej nej (.) var det samma du tänkte säga där Mia?
24. Mia: ja
25. SUE: u:m och därför fick han sitta i sån här karantän och det var det som kosta så mycket pengar (.) u:m (.) och då var hon ju- då tyckte hon att det var vä- viktigare och betala för katten än att köpa den där hästen

- 26. Mia: u:m
- 27. SUE: u:m

[4]

Group 4B:3. Participants: Julia, Sara, Mia, Ida, Dan, and SUE (teacher).

Book: *Smuggelkatten* by Lasse Ekholm. (Tape 4: 0.10.16.)

- 1. SUE: vilken sida vill du läsa då (.) Sara?
- 2. Sara: xx här um 80
- 3. SUE: sidan 80
- 4. Dan: <må:ste [man läsa]>?
- 5. Sara: [>fast jag ska inte läsa] en hel sida.
- 6. SUE: nä- ja alla måste läsa (.) och vilken sida har du valt ut då
Dan?
- 7. Dan: 46
- 8. SUE: um och e: Ida?
- 9. Ida: 46
- 10. SUE: också 46 (.) och Mia?
- 11. Mia: ja 27
- 12. SUE: å så bra att det var nån annan också tidigare and Julia?
- 13. Julia: 46
- 14. SUE: 46 du också? vad är det för spännande på sidan 46 då?
det låter mystiskt! jag måste-
- 15. Dan: men det är väl inget skojigt om alla
- 16. Mia: nej det blir ju inte det
- 17. Dan: nej
- 18. SUE: nej det var inget roligt men hur ska jag kunna göra
nånting åt det?
- 19. Dan: ja då vill inte jag läsa först
- 20. SUE: nej men du då är det som så att ni har ju tränat på dom
här sakerna
- 21. Ida: °men jag°-
- 22. Sara: me- men jag [kan läsa först]
- 23. SUE: [men sidan 46] den duger ju inte att läsa
- 24. Dan: jo
- 25. Sara: nä
- 26. SUE: nä
- 27. Sara: det är ju bara lite

28. SUE: jag sa minst en halvsida har vi ju sagt (.) och jag kan faktiskt börja undra litegrann (.) om det verkligen var så att-
29. Dan: °men jag har inte x°
30. Ida: °då tar jag 49°
31. SUE: -att Julia och Ida hade tänkt sig 46

BEYOND STEREOTYPES?

Talking about gender in school booktalk*

ABSTRACT The present paper addresses how gender is discussed in booktalk in Swedish schools, examining “book club” discussions, using a discursive approach. The data consist of authentic video-recorded teacherled booktalk sessions, involving small groups of pupils in grades 4–7. It was found that the teachers and/or the pupils invoked gender issues in all book club sessions. The fictive events were, at times, discussed in gender traditional and stereotyped ways. Yet, the teachers and pupils also transcended gender stereotypes in several cases. In many of those cases, there was a generational pattern, though, in that the pupils tended to apply less traditional thinking when talking about fictive children than when talking about fictive adults.

* Eriksson, K. (Revised version resubmitted to journal.)

Pippi was indeed a remarkable child. The most remarkable thing about her was that she was so strong. She was so very strong that in the whole wide world there was not a single police officer as strong as she.
(Lindgren, 1950/1997, pp. 13–14)

Introduction: Children's literature and gender

In Sweden, the gender bias in children's literature, became an issue among feminists in the 1960s. In her pioneer work, the sociologist Rita Liljeström claimed that gender stereotypical youth literature worked in concealed suggestive ways on the reader, and she pointed out the need to make this visible through, for example, content analysis (Liljeström, 1972, p. 54). In the wake of such critical analyses, a belief arose – in Sweden as well as internationally – that presenting non-stereotypical alternative, in fiction could counteract sexism. In 1945, the Swedish author Astrid Lindgren first presented Pippi Longstocking, a modernist female heroine, who, transcended generational and gender stereotypes of what young girls say and do. In a discussion of stereotypes in children's literature, Dixon (1977, p. 36) brought out *Pippi Longstocking* and other Swedish titles as good examples of non-sexist books. In the post-war period, children's literature in Sweden has had a good reputation for its modernist and progressive approaches. But, how is it today? And what happens when children in the real world are presented with non-stereotyped literature?

In her empirical research, Bronwyn Davies (1989b; Davies & Banks, 1992) discussed gender with children, after reading feminist and non-stereotyped tales aloud to them. She met recurrently with eight 4- and 5-year-old children and undertook participant observation at four different pre-schools in Australia (Davies, 1989b). The same issue was explored in a follow-up study four years later, in which Davies and Chas Banks (1992; Davies, 1993) drew on data from interaction with four of the previously interviewed children and four of the pre-school children. The findings of these studies showed that the children were already attuned

to the dominant discourses of gender, which meant that the non-sexist texts were at times read as traditional texts. The introduction of non-sexist content, curricula, and ideals alone are thus not enough (Davies & Banks, 1992). Davies and Banks claim that non-sexist texts in literature classes have to be accompanied by discussions around concepts like dominant discourse and discourses of resistance if they are to be read as non-sexist. Apparently, children must become aware of some poststructuralist notions, in order to resist dominant discourses on gender.

Alexis Wing has conducted a related study, involving classroom observations of a teacher, who read and discussed a feminist story with 10-11-year-olds. Wing (1997, p. 503) concluded: "it seems that [gender-stereotyping] awareness can be raised with a book as a catalyst, discussion and a teacher's intervention."

In Mexico, Evelyn Arizpe (2001) arranged a study of critical reading with twenty girls and boys in grade 8. She let them read a youth novel about a *conquistadora* and studied their responses to it. Arizpe's data consists both of the students' reading diaries and of interviews (group interviews as well as interviews with two students at a time). In the students' responses, Arizpe found contradictions between their admiration for the female *conquistadora* and their anxiety to lose gender qualities that they saw as constitutive of their female/male identity. Arizpe points out the importance of the cultural contexts for the reader's response process. Furthermore, Arizpe (2001, p. 35) stresses the equal importance of the texts' content, on one hand, and the presentation on the other.

Regardless of whether or not the tendency in a text is traditional or progressive when it comes to gender, the discussion about it can fall out in traditional or progressive terms. In a study of teachers' discussions of foreign language texts, Sunderland et al. (2000) noted a whole range of variation from the endorsing of traditional texts, through undermining progressive texts, to the transgression of traditional biases.

Davies and Banks' (1992), Wing's (1997) and Arizpe's (2001) studies were all arranged by the researchers themselves, from the selection of books to the discussion and interviewing. The situations were thus not part of the children's regular everyday lives. As a complement to such arranged studies, the present study concerns a type of setting that has not been studied, namely construction of gender in everyday, naturally occurring discussions of literature. This choice of setting is in line with discursive psychology (e.g. Potter, 1996a), where natural data are preferred to experimental and other arranged situations. I therefore found it important to study what occurs in authentic situations: how gender is oriented to in children's everyday life in school.

The official documents of the Swedish educational system promote gender equality as a central fundamental value (Utbildningsdepartementet [Ministry of Education and Science], 1998, p. 5). It is stated that work in schools should depict and mediate equality. One way of achieving this is through fiction, which according to the syllabus, provides students with knowledge about the living conditions of women and men during different epochs and in different countries (Skolverket [National Agency for Education], 1996, p. 77).

Gender equality has a relatively strong tradition in Sweden and gender issues are part of the Swedish syllabus. How is gender equality reflected in booktalk in school settings? How do teachers – in the light of the equality goal – treat pupils' orientation to gender in literature? The topic of the present article is how gender is treated in *authentic* discussions with children on books. Is gender made relevant by the teachers and/or the pupils? Are gender stereotypes counteracted, to the extent that they occur?

Method

The school studied, the Valley school, is a municipal elementary school in a medium-sized Swedish town, that has worked with

reading support at all levels for ten years. During one school year, I received permission from teachers and pupils to video-record the book clubs (3 sessions/group) for 8 different groups from 4 classes (grades 4–7, e.g. pupils aged 10–13); that is, a total of 24 book club sessions. Forty pupils (20 girls and 20 boys) and 5 teachers (4 women and 1 man) participated. It should be noted, though, that the booktalk practices – in all 24 conversations – are the primarily analytic units of this study. All names have been changed in order to maintain the participants’ anonymity.

Book club routines at the Valley school

As an obligatory part of the regular curriculum in grades 4 through 7, the Valley school ran *book clubs* (Swed. läsecirklar) inspired by Chambers’ (1993/1999) “booktalk” approach. The teacher-librarian introduced the book club activities in the classes by presenting 7–8 book titles in each class. The teacher-librarian chose books that were popular in the ages concerned. 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, which formed the basis for how the groups were arranged. Each club gathered for about 30 minutes, three times in a fortnight.

Recordings and transcriptions¹

In order to investigate the book club practices, in which, according to Chambers (1993/1999), talk is the most essential part, all the book club sessions were recorded in their entirety. The primary data of the present study consist of these video-recordings.²

At the actual filming, I tried to place the camera unobtrusively yet at a spot from which it would cover all participants.

I have followed the recommendations of Potter and Wetherell (1995), making *in extenso* transcriptions of the entire data set, which amounts to about 450 A4 pages. Thereafter gender-relevant examples have been chosen and transcribed in more detail. These

transcriptions cover overlaps, emphasis, loudness, pauses, and prolongation of sounds and latching. Finally, a native English-speaking professional translator has translated the chosen examples in collaboration with the author.

Coding and analysis

There has recently been a discussion about gender analytical issues and participants' orientation among discourse analysts (Kitzinger, 2000; Schegloff, 1998; Stokoe & Smithson, 2001; Wetherell, 1998). The part of the discussion that is most relevant to the present study was what counts as an orientation towards gender. In line with the reasoning of more or less CA oriented research (for example, Stokoe & Smithson, 2001, p. 225), I have chosen to define "oriented towards" broadly as *explicit reference to gender* (e.g. 'her', 'him', 'girl', 'guy', and so on). This includes situations where the participant *could have chosen not to orient towards gender* by, for example, using another expression (e.g. 'person', 'friend', 'individual', 'character', and so on).

With such a framework, it is indeed possible to combine CA oriented research and feminist discourse analysis (Stokoe & Smithson, 2001, p. 220). When departing from the participants' orientation, gender is found to be relevant in the present booktalk interactions in that the teachers as well as the pupils explicitly refer to gender in the sessions.

After completing the first rough transcriptions, I indexed the material, drawing on the transcriptions, and repeated viewing of the videotapes. The selection criterion was *any sequence where the participants oriented towards gender*. In this process it became clear that gender was an issue that was oriented towards, in various ways both by the teachers and by the pupils, in all book club sessions. The next step in the coding process was to choose sequences where gender was *elaborated* or *discussed* by the participants. I identified 16 different occasions, which constitute the base of the present study.

Male narrator as implicit norm?

In a study of influence of social context in reading, a text that did not reveal the narrator's sex was used (Howard & Allen, 1989, p. 296). It was found that many readers mistakenly thought that the narrator was male rather than female. According to Howard and Allen, the explanation for this is that the readers' previous literary experience is that most stories are narrated by a male voice, and that men in general are seen as having the authority to speak. In the present data, one of the books, *The Year of the Badger* (Burkett, 1972/1985) (Swed. *Nikki – min vän grävlingen* (Burkett, 1988/1989).) does not reveal the sex of the (male) narrator, and the main character, until right at the end.³ In some respect, the text is therefore gender neutral. Would the pupils automatically read the narrator as male in line with the findings of Howard and Allen (1989)?

Already in the first book club session, the teacher asked the pupils to think about whether the narrator was male or female during their reading. This question was repeated in the third session from which extract 1, below, is drawn.

[1]

Group 5B:3.** Participants: Asta, Ebba, Ylva (girls), Jan (boy) and LARA (teacher).

Book: *Nikki – min vän grävlingen* by Molly Burkett. (Tape 10: 0.05.00.)

1. → LARA: is the speaker ((of the book)) a boy or a girl?
2. Ebba: bo[y]
3. Asta. [bo]y
4. LARA: when did you find that out? hehe
5. Asta: when they bought the tie!
6. Ebba: e::
7. LARA: hehe
8. Ebba: suit
9. LARA: ((Finds the page in the book.)) the last chapter! I really thought that was quite funny (.) page 112

10. ((Turns withdrawn from the extract.))
 11. LARA: ((Reading out loud from the book.)) “At the weekend when it all came to an end. We had gone together to Winchester to buy me a suit.”
hehe and then I thought (.) oh I see
 12. Ebba: did you think it was a girl?
 13. LARA: I was completely- <when I read this book-> what did you think? ((Points at Ylva.))
 14. Ylva: I thought that it was a guy
 15. Asta: I [thought that it was a girl]
 16. Ebba: [I THOUGHT ALL THE TIME] LIKE, THIS WAS A [GUY BECAUSE (.)] YOU COULD TELL
 17. Ylva: [but as soon]- as soon as I read this I saw that it was you know a guy [that it was (.)]
 18. Ebba: [I saw my mind that it was a guy-]
 19. Ylva: a guy and girl who were brother and sister because I saw a guy in front of me all the time
- ** Group 5B:3 = grade 5, group B, session 3.

The teacher problematizes the narrator's gender identity, 'is the speaker ((of the book)) a boy or a girl?' (Swed. 'Är ((bokens)) jag en pojke eller en flicka?') (turn 1). She laughingly asks the pupils about when they discovered the true identity of the narrator (turn 4). Ebba and Ylva claim that they thought of the narrator as a boy all the time, while Asta thought that the narrator was a girl. (During my own reading, I noticed early that the narrator's sex was not revealed, but although I searched attentively for clues I mistakenly thought that the narrator was female.)

It seems impossible to read without identifying or at least speculating about the gender of a given first person narrator. The pupils in the present session were, in fact, explicitly encouraged to reflect on the narrator's gender though. The majority of them thought that the unknown narrator was male. As discussed above, the tendency to identify the narrator as male when the gender is unknown has been noted in other studies as well. The present finding thus provides a striking example of our tendency to categorise by gender.

It can be noted that the eight authors were evenly divided between women and men (as is the gender of the pupils in the study). Yet, six of the eight books discussed in my material involve a male protagonist.

Fictive characters as ideals

In the participants' discussions about the characters in the books they read, I found a difference between the discussion about children or young characters and discussions about adult characters. When young characters, for instance, in the same age as the pupils themselves, were focused, the discussion often concerned potential identification with these characters. The next three examples treat such discussions of same-aged characters.

Looking up to a fictive character

In example 2, the book discussed, *Isnatt* [Eng. Ice Night] (Sørllø, 1989) was a dramatic story about two siblings, Tina and Kjell, and their friend Leif. They had had to spend a cold winter night on a desert island.

[2]

Group 7A:2. Participants: Eva, Anja, Åsa (girls), and MARY (teacher).
Book: *Isnatt* by Steinar Sørllø. (Tape 6: 0.12.10.)

1. MARY: how do you see her ((Tina)) now that you have continued reading? she- you had opinions about her last time do you remember what you said about her then?
2. Eva: [she] seemed-
3. Åsa: [nope]
4. Eva: well or ah I dunno-
5. Åsa: (xx)
6. Åsa: she seemed- she stands kind of like halfway between
7. Eva: she's both like that kind and cour- or not cour- I don't really know

8. Åsa: she's kind of she wants- it was when- she doesn't really know if she should be courageous or if she should be [like that (xx)]
9. Eva: [she seems to be] self-confident!
10. Anja: uh, it was good
11. (. . .)
12. MARY: is there something in particular you are thinking about when you say she's self-confident?
13. Anja: yes she is a little kind of courageous (.) you might say
14. Åsa: she often knows what she should d [o]
15. Anja: [ye:ah]
16. Eva: but we really don't get to know much about her! but like you still feel that °well°-
- 17.→ Anja: she seems to be quite calm in her ways (.) and not (.) like not well starting to scream as soon as there's a spider or something
- 18.→ MARY: is she kind of a girl you look up to a little bit?
19. Eva: I think she seems cool!
20. ?: hehe yes ((Giggling.))
21. MARY: yes!
22. Anja: starts to scream (x)
23. MARY: and still she is not somehow tough in some way
24. Several: no:
25. ?: but kind of
26. MARY: >exactly what you just said I believe< calm (.) cool (.) but not tough, huh
27. Åsa: no

Being a self-confident girl is co-constructed as being 'a little kind of courageous' (Anja in turn 13), and someone who 'often knows what she should do' (Åsa in turn 14) and being 'quite calm' (Anja in turn 17). In her attempt to describe the heroine Tina, Anja orients to gender, invoking the stereotype of a hysterical woman screaming because of a spider (turn 17). A hysterical female, a pretty ridiculous and dependent person, is thus contrasted to the heroine, a calm and rational girl, who is not frightened by things that are not dangerous.

One phenomenon that can be seen when using discourse variation as an analytical lever (Potter, 1997, pp. 150–152; 1998, pp. 136–137; Potter & Wetherell, 1994) is the shift in Åsa's description of Tina. Åsa starts saying that the heroine does not really know how to be, 'she doesn't really know if she should be courageous or if she should be like that' (Swed. 'Hon vet inte riktigt hur hon ska vara om hon ska vara modig eller om hon ska vara såhär' (turn 8). In contrast, Eva states that Tina is self-confident (turn 9)⁴, and is supported by both Anja and the teacher. Åsa's recycled categorisation of Tina, 'she often knows what she should do' (Swed. 'hon vet oftast hur hon ska göra') (turn 14), can almost be seen as a reversal of her initial statement. In the shift from 'not knowing really how to be' (in turn 8) to 'often knowing what to do' (in turn 14), the heroine appears as a more self-confident character.

After the pupils' co-constructed description of the heroine, the teacher, orients to gender asking if she is a girl to 'look up to' (turn 18). The heroine is thus explicitly compared to real schoolgirls. Ultimately, the teacher sums up 'exactly what you just said I believe calm cool but not tough' (Swed. 'precis som ni säger tror jag lugn cool men ändå inte häftig va' ' (turn 26).

As can be seen (turn 2-10 and 13-17), the girls are co-constructing a description of the heroine, together with their female teacher (turn 18). The reading group in this example is an all female group. Integrating Stanley Fish's (1980/1998, p. 322) reader-response model with feminist arguments, one could – at a meta-level – regard the social world of women as a *interpretive community* and the social world of men as another. In a minimal sense, the girls can be seen to form an interpretive community in that they orient towards a shared understanding of the identity of the main character.

Is he a sweet guy?

The following example is drawn from a discussion about the book *Smuggelkatten* [The Smuggled Cat] (Ekholm, 1990). The main character is a girl, called Anna. On her return from a vacation with

her father to Greece, Anna tried to smuggle a “foundling cat” into Sweden. In the end, the cat, Drama, had to be put in quarantine. Anna is a bit of an outsider in school and at the stables. She shares her interest in animals with a boy, Per, something of an outsider in the peer group.

[3]

Group 4B:2. Participants: Julia, Sara, Mia, Ida (girls), Dan (boy), and SUE (teacher). Book: *Smuggelkatten* by Lasse Ekholm. (Tape 3: 0.47.00. I.e. less than 10 minutes from start.)

1. → SUE: did you think that (.) that this Per then seemed to be a sweet guy?
2. Mia: yes
3. Sara: ye:s
4. SUE: °uh huh huh° Mia what did you think?
5. → Mia: well yes he was like just like Anna for he too liked little animals better than big animals
6. SUE: uh huh so in him she had like a real pal
7. ?: uh
8. SUE: yes

In the first turn of the sequence, the teacher asks what the pupils thought about a minor character, Per. Her question pre-categorises Per as ‘sweet’ (Swed. ‘mysig’, which literally means ‘cosy’ in English).

The teacher’s choice of label for Per does not follow the stereotypical traditional gender pattern of a strong silent, action-oriented male who keeps his feelings to himself. (Nor does Mia’s positioning of Anna and Per as equals when it comes to caring interests.) Maybe this is due to Per’s age; he is not yet a fully-grown male. Although Per is a minor character, he is the most important male character in the book. However, it can be noted that the only boy in the group, Dan, does not comment on whether or not Per is ‘sweet’.

The teacher also foregrounds the fact that Per is male, in her use of the word ‘guy’. She could just as well have posed her question as an open question without the suggestive label ‘sweet’ and/or without marking Per’s maleness. E.g. ‘Tell me what you think of Per?’ However, the pupils do not explicitly orient towards the gender issue. At least Mia does not discuss the two characters in terms of *difference* (cf. Braidotti, 1994; Kessler & McKenna, 1978; Rubin, 1975). Thus, making gender relevant does not automatically involve *separating* things like interests. Instead, Mia foregrounds the similarity between Anna and Per; he is ‘just like Anna’ (turn 5). She thus does not follow up the teacher’s invitation to talk about Per as a ‘sweet guy’. If anything, he is positioned as a ‘sweet person’. When Mia foregrounds sameness (turn 5), the teacher in turn, rephrases her question, using the gender-neutral expression ‘pal’ (Swed. ‘kompis’, turn 6), thereby reorienting towards gender-*neutrality*.

To be like Anna or to be like the cat?

In contrast, in the next extract three of the four female pupils seem to identify with the main character, Anna, when asked about if they would like to be like her. Yet, neither Dan nor Ida demonstrates any particular interest in her.

[4]

Group 4B:2. Participants: Julia, Sara, Mia, Ida (girls), Dan (boy) and SUE (teacher).

Book: *Smuggelkatten* by Lasse Ekholm. (Tape 3: 1.03.46.)

1. SUE: would any of you like to be Anna? be like Anna?
2. ((Sara and Mia raise their hands. Julia raises her hand too.))
3. → SUE: yes all the girls
4. Mia: she has such a kind dad
5. Sara: I’d also like to be like Anna ((Chuckling.))

6. SUE: you'd like that yes ((Turns towards Dan.)) who would like to be? would you like to be like [Per the bird]-watcher?
7. Dan: [the cat!]
8. ((Sara and Mia laugh.))
9. SUE: live a spoiled life you mean? I can see that uh: so you like that kind of food (.) liverpaté and sardines and whatever the cat?
10. Dan: nope only tuna
11. SUE: you like tuna
12. Sara: hehe
13. SUE: then you could be a kitty-cat in that way uh hu
14. Dan: and prawns
15. SUE: yes that's not bad that's not bad

The teacher initiates an act of displaying identification with the main character Anna, when asking whether any one would like to be like her (turn 1). Three of the four girls in the group raise their hands. The teacher's interpretation of their response ('yes all the girls') is, apparently, orientated towards gender in its underlying assumption that Sara, Mia and Julia would want to be or be like Anna since they themselves are girls (turn 3). When saying that *all* the girls wanted to be like Anna the teacher does not address the fact that Ida did not raise her hand; she does not ask Ida whom in the book she would like to be.

The teacher then immediately turns to Dan, the only boy in the group, asking who he would like to be, and if he would like to be Per, the birdwatcher (turn 6). Dan responds that he would rather be the cat (turn 7). Until the very moment when the teacher and Dan overlap each other speaking, the main character Anna has been in focus. I would like to argue that the teacher makes this a gender issue with her utterance in turn 3 – that all the *girls* would want to be like Anna – despite the fact that one girl, Ida, does not respond. This interpretation is sustained by the teacher's way of turning towards, the only *boy*, Dan, to find out who he would want to be like (turn 6). Yet, he apparently has not found any important

male character to choose. Therefore, he identifies more with the (male) cat who is an important character, than with the girl, even though she is the main character.

In a study of 6- and 8-year-old children's readings of a fairy tale on TV, Ingegerd Rydin (1996, pp. 174–175) has shown that a majority of her interviewees identified with a same-sex character. As did the children in Davies' (1989a, p. 230) fairy tale study. Similarly, Howard and Allen (1989, p. 296) claim that because more stories are told by a male narrator than by a female, boys are not trained in gender-transgressive identification while reading. Both these findings are consistent with Dan's choice to identify with a (male) animal rather than with a girl.

In all the above examples, the teachers indirectly teach the pupils to see same-age characters as potential ideals. Yet, the discussions also play with identities: you could be someone other than you are. The fictive character is thus given a function of expanding the pupils' repertoires of possible actions and ways of being, and in the extension, of presenting possible subject-positions. ('Subject-position' refers to different subjectivities produced in discourses (for further reading see e.g. Davies & Harré, 1990; Henriques, 1984).)

Gender stereotypes and ideal parents

When the adult characters were discussed more closely in the book club sessions, they were usually discussed in their capacity as mothers or fathers, that is as gendered adults, not as someone who the pupils would want 'to be like' or 'to look up to' as in the case of same-aged characters. When parallels were drawn to the pupils' own lives, it was thus primarily the *child-parent relation* that is invoked, not the parents' thoughts or feelings. This is illustrated in the following three examples.

Mummy and her “little guy”

The next two examples constitute continuations of extract 2. After finishing the explorative characterisation of Per (is he a sweet guy?), the teacher immediately directed the discussion on to other persons around the main character.

[5]

Group 4B:2. Participants: Julia, Sara, Mia, Ida, Dan and SUE (teacher).

Book: *Smuggelkatten* by Lasse Ekholm. (Tape 3: 0.47.18. I.e. 10 minutes from start.)

1. SUE: what about mum and dad then? Were they buddies of hers that she could talk to and all or what was it like? (4) e:h there should be more of you than Sara and Mia who can answer [xx])
2. Sara: [hehe]
3. SUE: well you claim you have read the book!
4. Dan: yes
5. SUE: ye:s! (3) Sara then
6. → Sara: her mum cared like so much about her **little guy** and she said that Anna was t– Anna was big now and would take care of herself and her dad was mostly away like
7. SUE: what little guy were you talking about then?
8. Sara: no:e it=
9. SUE: =Ida who was that little guy?
10. Ida: ((Shrugs her shoulders and rolls her eyes.))
11. Sara: it wasn't a little guy but it was-
12. Mia?: p- p-
13. SUE: it was a grow- yes
14. Mia: it was her partner then
15. SUE: yes indeed you know u:h
16. Mia: [she only cared about if- a:h a:h]
17. SUE: [mum and dad were well- were well divorced] and all that
18. Mia: she only cared about him all the time
19. SUE: uh huh yes
20. Dan: like a little baby

21. SUE: yes she thought well that it wa- was thought like- Anna she thought like this that mums and dads they liked w-like well always their children best
22. Sara: ye:s
23. SUE: 'cause that's like what she believed anyhow
24. Sara: ye:s

The teacher apparently wants to initiate a discussion about the relations between the main character, Anna, and her parents, asking if they were her buddies (Swed. 'bra kompisar') whom she could talk to (turn 1). Sara answers negatively, talking about how Anna's mother primarily cares about her 'little guy' (Swed. 'lilla kille') referring to the mother's partner in a contemptuous tone of voice (turn 6). One interpretation of Sara's belittling categorisation of the heroine's mother's new partner, is that she positions him as a child, thereby ridiculing him. Also, this mother is deprived of any other function than being a Mother. Sara also explains that the father is mostly away. One could say that, from Sara's point of view, both parents fail to fulfil their parental duties towards Anna. In this matter, Sara renders Anna's opinion as it is expressed in the text where Anna criticises her mother for caring more about her partner than about her daughter (Ekholm, 1990, pp. 7–8, 37–38).

The mother is criticised for prioritising adult life as a woman together with her new love over her life as a mother. Anna's father on the other hand, prioritises business trips and consequently living alone over letting Anna live with him. In the story, Anna says she would prefer living with her father. Especially after her mother's boyfriend moved in with them. Sara, the reader, similarly displays strong negative feelings about the main character's situation in relation to her mother, stronger than about the main character's situation in relation to her father. Sara is not the only pupil to pick up on Anna's critique of her mother: Mia says that the mother only cared about her partner 'all the time' (turn 18). Dan aligns with their critique of Anna's mother, saying that she fussed over her boyfriend like a baby (turn 20).

This text can be read as gender-traditional, in the sense that the mother is expected to sacrifice her own adult life in favour of the children, while, in principal, a father “gets away” with a smaller proportion of parent-related responsibilities. In their joint condemnation of the mother (and not the father) the pupils’ discussion can be described in terms of a traditional reading of a gender-traditional text. These stereotypes are also sustained by the teacher in her way of bringing forward and “allowing” statements that can be understood as relatively stereotypical. Another example is her foregrounding on Anna’s opinion – in relation to her mother’s new partner – that parents should always love their children best (turn 21). In this context, we should recall the objective of the curriculum – that the study of literature should open the pupils’ minds about the different living conditions of men and women and gender equity. What is the teacher’s reaction to the group’s traditional reading?

The teacher’s attempts to transgress stereotyped categorisations of good/bad parents can be seen in the discussion that followed soon after.

[6]

Group 4B:2. Participants: Julia, Sara, Mia, Ida (girls), Dan (boy) and SUE (teacher). Book: *Smuggelkatten* by Lasse Ekholm. (Tape 3: 0.53.51. I.e. over 15 minutes from start.)

1. SUE: yes that sounds exiting but now it’s time for us to and we think a bit about our book well yes it seems to us that the dad was very nice
2. ?: ye:s
3. ?: uh:
4. SUE: and her mum was?
5. Dan: not so nice
6. → SUE: yes but she didn’t really say that but she just didn’t have too much time for her right now
7. Dan?: uh:

8. SUE: [this one-]
9. Sara: [no but] it seemed like as if she was very- didn't have time like this then- didn't care so much-
10. SUE: no=
11. Sara: =wasn't so nice
12. SUE: and that came out even early in the book when Anna thought that the best things about going to Greece besides Drama-
13. Mia: hehe
14. SUE: -what that was that? uh
15. Mia: she was got away from mum and that she didn't have to-
16. SUE: ye:s=
17. Sara: =[that guy!]=
18. Mia: =[like to be with]-
19. SUE: ye:s
20. Mia: -that she was with that guy
21. SUE: and that she could be with instead?
22. Mia: yes
23. Sara: [her da]d
24. SUE: [dad!]
25. Mia: her dad who was really nice
26. → SUE: °well° but he- why at the same time she thought he was a bit of a pain
27. Mia &
Sara: yes
28. SUE: do you remember Ida why she thought that he was a bit of a pain?
29. Ida: ((Shakes her head.))
30. Dan?: no:
31. SUE: Julia?
32. Julia: °cause he was almost all going to look at old ruins and then was a bit strange 'cause (xx) piles of stones (x)°

On two occasions, the teacher apparently orients towards the pupils' intolerant perspective on the mother, trying to balance it (turns 6 and 26). In the first instance, Dan first suggested that the mother was 'not so nice' and the teacher's response to this is an attempt to mitigate his reaction (turn 6). She does this by drawing

attention to the fact that Anna actually did not indicate a direct dislike of her mother but was primarily discontent about being neglected by her. The teacher's next attempt at modulating the pupils' quite harsh categorisations is expressed after Mia's description of the heroine's father as 'really nice', when she reminds her that the heroine liked her father, but that she also thought that he was a bit of a pain (turn 26). In this example, the teacher thus recurrently challenges the pupils' gender-traditional discussion about a gender-traditional book.

Not a typical mum

An ideal mother is also invoked in another book club discussion that concerned a different book, *Hjälp! Boan är lös!* [Eng. Help! The Boa is Loose] (Zak, 1987/1989). Freedom is the overall theme of this book. The lifestyle of 24-year old Gustav, called Guttav, and his mother Birgit, called Isidora, can be described as free and unconventional.

[7]

Group 4A:2. Participants: Mats, Tony, Bert (boys), Inga (girl) and MARY (teacher). Book: *Hjälp! Boan är lös!* by Monica Zak.

(Tape 1: 0.39.55. I.e. 9 minutes from start.)

1. MARY: ((Looks at Inga.)) so you had taken Isidora as one of the main characters? (.) what do you think she was like?
2. Inga: noo, not especially strict about things how they looked and all that [(xx) dancing (xx)]-
3. Mats: [well she dances] at least
4. MARY: ((Points from Mats to Inga.)) ° (x) has to wait°
5. Inga: °(xx) danced°
6. MARY: she liked to dance and she was not especially strict about things ((Enumerates the characteristics on her fingers.))
7. Inga: nope
8. MARY: ((Looks towards Mats.)) what else were you thinking of?

9. Mats: I guess I was thinking about the dancing (.) she- what's it called, Hampus went like and hid on the shoeshelf when Isi- Isidora put on- put the music on
10. MARY: ((Nods.))
11. Tony: (xx)
(xx)
12. Mats: (xx)
13. MARY: have the two of you thought about Isidora at all? ((Points at Bert and Tony.))
- 14.→ Bert: (xx) (.) she's like- what's it called- well she's not so mature
15. MARY: is she a typical mum?
- 16.→ Several: no:e:
17. Bert: °no no mum°
18. MARY: what's a typical mum like then?
19. Inga: she is supposed to [nag]
20. Bert: [nag]ging
21. MARY: well! (.) and Isidora didn't?
22. Several: no:o:
23. Inga: (xx) then you didn't have to do certain things at home like cleaning your room an stuff
24. MARY: Guttav didn't have to do that
25. Inga: n-o
26. MARY: how do we find out that she wasn't so strict? was it through- uh- this dog we got to know it or did we get to know it because of something else?
27. Inga: that she wasn't like (.) about clothes either and all (.) she wasn't directly- about the clothes- and all that either (xx)
28. ((Eight turns withdrawn from extract.))
29. MARY: and that's how we get to know a bit about her maybe being quite sloppy
30. Tony(?): °uh°
31. MARY: yes well I too have fluff balls at home sometimes (.) do you?
32. Several: yes
33. Mats(?): probably we all have
34. Tony: hehe I have ones as big as this ((Shows with his hands?))
35. MARY: hehe yes! (.) well yes but mums nag but this mum didn't

When the teacher sums up the pupils' descriptions of the mother Isidora, she enumerates two main features: her dancing and her carelessness in household matters (turn 6).

In the ongoing discussion, Bert expresses an indirect critique of the adult Isidora, who has parental responsibility of her grown-up son, by judging her as not really being mature (turn 14). The teacher's follow-up question 'is she a typical mum?' indirectly establishes that there *is* something like a 'typical mum'. Secondly, the question leads the group discussion into a judgmental direction, orienting towards her feminine, and more precisely, motherly qualities (turn 15). As a response to this, several of the pupils claim that Isidora is not a typical mum. In order to judge, one has to compare her with some type of ideal. Which link of the comparison should be discussed here? Since the teacher has already posed the question about what Isidora is like, she leads the discussion onto the other link of the comparison. Therefore, the discussion concerns the characteristics of a (stereo)typical mum (turn 18). The discussion of a text that, in at least one sense, can be read as progressive thus partly turns into a non-progressive discussion.

The pupils do not express any dislike of the atypical mum. Nor do they express any appreciation of her either. In one comment, the teacher defines Isidora as quite sloppy (turn 29). However, in her following turn (turn 31) she initiates a joint confession about housework sloppiness (turn 32). Hereafter, Mats suggests that fluff balls are probably very common in peoples' homes (turn 33). To sum up, Isidora's behaviour is neither condemned, nor admired in the booktalk session.

In sum, Isidora, the dancer and sloppy housekeeper, is discussed as a female *parent*: a mother, compared to a prototypical mother who nags her family about keeping the house clean. Thus, Isidora can be seen as a non-traditional female character. Yet, the pupils primarily discussed her as an 'immature' (turn 14) parent not as a person in her own right.

Summary

In a classical formulation, Stanley Fish (1980/1998) has asked us: is there a text in this class? In the present booktalk data, the discussion and the read texts were inextricably intertwined. Obviously, there were many readings, many texts rather than one unitary reading of each book. Yet, these “texts” were also partly the joint products of the discussions and the texts as such.

The use of the research method in the present study shows that a combination of CA-oriented and feminist discourse analysis is indeed possible (Stokoe & Smithson, 2001, p. 220). Departing from the participants’ orientation, gender was found to be relevant in the booktalk interaction in that the teachers as well as the pupils explicitly referred to gender in the sessions. When gender was made relevant, as the teachers and pupils talked about ‘guy’, ‘girls’, ‘mum’ etc, they also discussed the appropriate conduct of such gendered categories.

Valerie Walkerdine (1990, p. 88–89) acknowledges that feminist criticisms of gender bias in children’s literature have contributed in valuable ways when it comes to putting fictional content on the agenda. (Walkerdine uses the notion “text” in a broad sense, including books, films, and images, i.e. as systems of signification.) However, Walkerdine claims that feminist approaches have often disregarded the text itself as productive of meaning. She sees an underlying idea that stereotyped literature depicts reality in a biased and distorted way. Conversely, access to non-stereotyped views and images would provoke changes in thinking and acting. According to Walkerdine, two issues in particular are problematic with this approach. Firstly, the idea that children’s understanding of themselves and of their possible actions will change if they are faced with a broader variety of experiences. Secondly, that this unproblematic transformation will occur by adapting non-stereotyped activities. In Walkerdine’s view, the problem with these two ideas is that a passive learner is a prerequisite; a rational learner

who would change as a result of being presented with the proper information, about how things *really* are. Walkerdine argues for another way of theorising about literature and the process of appropriation.

Textual images are themselves a constituent part of reality. Texts (as cultural practices) cannot be expected to change an extra-textual reality. Texts create places for identification and subject-positions in the text itself. Walkerdine proposes an engagement with the production of selves as subjects, in relation to cultural practices. In her view, the subject-positions made available by the texts are related to social and psychological battles concerning identity.⁵ At the same time, the subject-positions are the tools the reader uses to get into the text.

The major findings of the present study, can be summarised in two points:

- (i) *In several cases, pupils as well as the teachers oriented to gender in traditional and, at times, stereotyped ways. The pupils did this partly directed by their teachers' questions.*

The characters in the same age as the pupils were by the teachers pointed out to be potential persons of identification. The teachers displayed a presumption that girls should identify with female characters and boys with male characters. Some, but not all girls did, and one boy related to a (male) animal rather than to a female heroine. On another occasion, the pupils resisted the teacher's orientation towards (stereotypical) gender differences, refocusing on sameness thereby making the teacher re-orient towards gender neutrality. Since the discussions around the texts did not necessarily follow the partly non-traditional gender patterns of those in the texts, I believe that my study proves Walkerdine right: it is not sufficient just to present non-stereotype fictive alternatives to make a change in thinking of real world children.

- (ii) *Yet, the teachers and pupils also transcended gender stereotypes and expectations in several cases. In many of those cases, there was a generational pattern, though, in that both groups tended to apply less traditional thinking when talking about their own age group.*

I have also explored an example of a teacher who challenged the pupils' gender-traditional discussion of a gender-traditional text. However, it remains unclear if this resulted in a less traditional reading on the part of the pupils. It could not be seen in the transcripts if she managed to convince the pupils.

When discussing the living condition of adult characters, these discussions generally concerned adults as parents, that is, from a child's perspective. The adult characters were discussed as potential parents of the pupils themselves (e.g. as nice/not nice parents), not as characters that the pupils could identify with. There was also a tendency for the children to be more tolerant of non-traditional behaviour in their discussions of younger characters than in their discussions of adults.

The reader responses in the booktalk sessions thus involved both gender patterns and generational patterns.

Notes

1. Transcription symbols mainly based in discursive psychology (Edwards, 1997).
[] Square brackets mark the start and end of overlapping speech.
Underlining Signals emphasis; the extent of underlining within individual words locates emphasis.
Bold Pronunciation differs from surrounding speech, e.g. irony, theatrical.
CAPITALS Mark speech that is obviously louder than surrounding speech.
◦ Quieter speech.
(4) Measure pauses in seconds.
(.) Micropause.
((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 Example.
(text)		Uncertain interpretation.
(x) (xx)		Inaudible word or words.
hehe		Laughter.

2. Due to technical mistakes the recordings lack sound in three cases (5A:1, 5B:2 and 6A:1). In all, 21 book sessions were transcribed.

3. When reading the original English version, it is, however, possible to draw the conclusion that the narrator is a boy, using the information in the blurb.

4. The expression used in Swedish, ‘säker på sig själv’, literally means ‘secure in one self’. In Swedish this can also be expressed by the word ‘själsäker’ (‘self-confident’); which can have both positive and a negative connotations. In contrast, the English language has two words for this concept: the more positively charged ‘self-confident’ and the positively or negatively charged ‘self-assured’, which is, a somewhat more ambiguous term with respect to value connotations.

5. Walkerdine’s important work, in the power of traditional structures and the desires that make us chose traditional patterns is however a side issue from the present study.

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Appendix. Swedish originals

[1]

Group 5B:3. Participants: Asta, Ebba, Ylva (girls), Jan (boy) and LARA (teacher). Book: *Nikki – min vän grävlingen* by Molly Burkett.
(Tape 10: 0.05.00.)

1. → LARA: är ((bokens)) jag en pojke eller en flicka?
2. Ebba: po [jke]
3. Asta. [poj]ke
4. LARA: när kom ni underfund med det? hihi
5. Asta: när de köpte slipsen!
6. Ebba: e::
7. LARA: hihi
8. Ebba: kostym
9. LARA: ((Slår upp boken.)) sista kapitlet! jag tyckte det var lite roligt alltså (.) sidan 112
10. ((Borttagen ordväxling med Jan, som inte har läst läxan, om när han ska redovisa.))
11. LARA: ((Läser högt ur boken.)) ”Det var den helgen då det hela fick ett slut. Vi hade åkt till Winscester allihop för att köpa kostym till mig.” hihi och så tänkte jag (.) jaha

12. Ebba: trodde du att det var en tjej?
13. LARA: jag var helt- <när jag läste den här boken-> vad har du tyckt? ((Pekar på Ylva.))
14. Ylva: jag trodde det var en kille
15. Asta: jag [trodde det var en tjej]
16. Ebba: [JAG TYCKTE HELA TIDEN] LIKSOM DET HÄR VAR EN [KILLE FÖR (.)] DET MÄRKTES
17. Ylva: [men så fort]- så fort jag läste så såg jag att det var vad heter det en kille
[att det var (.)]
18. Ebba: [jag såg framför mig att det var en kille-]
19. Ylva: en kille och tjej som var syskon för jag såg en kille framför mig hela tiden

[2]

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

Book: *Isnatt* by Steinar Sørllø.

(Tape 6: 0.12.10.)

1. MARY: hur uppfattar ni henne ((Tina)) nu när ni har fortsatt och läst? hon- ni hade ju åsikter om henne förra gången kommer ni ihåg vad ni sa om henne då?
2. Eva: [hon] verkade-
3. Åsa: [näe]
4. Eva: jo eller äh jag vet inte-
5. Åsa: (xx)
6. Åsa: hon verkar- hon står liksom typ mittemellan
7. Eva: hon är både såhär snäll och mod- eller inte mod- jag vet inte riktigt
8. Åsa: hon är liksom hon vill- det var det där- hon vet inte riktigt hur hon ska vara om hon ska vara modig eller om hon ska vara [såhär (xx)]
9. Eva: [hon verkar vara] säker på sig själv!
10. Anja: um, det var bra
11. (. . .)
12. MARY: är det några särskilda saker ni tänker på då när ni säger att hon är säker på sig själv?
13. Anja: ja hon är lite så här modig (.) om man säger

14. Åsa: hon vet oftast hur hon ska g [öra]
15. Anja: [ja:a]
16. Eva: fast man får ju inte veta så mycket om henne! men liksom ändå känner man att °ja°-
17. → Anja: det verkar som att hon är ganska lugn av sig (.) och inte (.) såhär inte ja börjar skrika så fort det kommer en spindel typ eller nåt
18. → MARY: är det liksom en tjej som ni ser upp till lite?
19. Eva: jag tycker hon verkar cool!
20. ?: hihi ja ((Fnittrande.))
21. MARY: ja!
22. Anja: börja skrika (x)
23. MARY: och ändå är hon ju inte häftig på nåt sätt och vis
24. Flera: nå:
25. ?: utan liksom
26. MARY: >pricis som ni säger tror jag< lugn (.) cool (.) men ändå inte häftig va
27. Åsa: nej

[3]

Group 4B:2. Participants: Julia, Sara, Mia, Ida (girls), Dan (boy), and SUE (teacher). Book: *Smuggelkatten* by Lasse Ekholm.

(Tape 3: 0.47.00. I.e. less than 10 minutes from start.)

1. → SUE: tyckte ni att (.) att den här Per då verka va en mysig kille?
2. Mia: ja
3. Sara: ja:
4. SUE: °um um um° Mia, vad tänkte du på?
5. → Mia: jamen han var ju just likadan som Anna för han tyckte ju också om smådjur mer än stora djur
6. SUE: um um så där hade hon ju en riktig kompis
7. ?: um
8. SUE: ja

[4]

Group 4B:2. Participants: Julia, Sara, Mia, Ida (girls), Dan (boy) and SUE (teacher). Book: *Smuggelkatten* by Lasse Ekholm.

(Tape 3: 1.03.46.)

1. SUE: skulle nån utav er vilja vara Anna? vara som Anna?
2. ((Sara och Mia räcker upp handen. Julia räcker också upp handen.))
- 3.→ SUE: ja alla tjejerna
4. Mia: hon har en så snäll pappa
5. Sara: jag skulle också vilja vara som Anna ((Småskrattande.))
6. SUE: du skulle det ja ((Vänder ansiktet mot Dan.)) vem skulle du vilja vara då? skulle du vilja vara som [Per fågel-] skådaren?
- 7.→ Dan: [katten!]
8. ((Sara och Mia skrattar.))
9. SUE: ha det skönt va? jag förstår det um: tycker du om såndär mat då (.) leverpastej och sardiner vad den fick för nånting?
10. Dan: näe bara tonfisk
11. SUE: du gillar tonfisk
12. Sara: hihi
13. SUE: då skulle du kunna va kissekatt på det viset hmhm
14. Dan: och räkor
15. SUE: ja det är inte fel det är inte fel

[5]

Group 4B:2. Participants: Julia, Sara, Mia, Ida, Dan and SUE (teacher).

Book: *Smuggelkatten* by Lasse Ekholm.

(Tape 3: 0.47.18. I.e. 10 minutes from start.)

1. SUE: hur var det med mamma och pappa då? var de bra kompisar till henne som hon kunde prata med och så där eller hur var det med det? (4) aeh det är väl fler än Sara och Mia som kan[(xx)]!
2. Sara: [hihi]
3. SUE: ni har ju läst boken säger ni!
4. Dan: ja

5. SUE: ja:!(3) Sara då
6. → Sara: hennes mamma brydde sig ju så mycket om sin **lilla kille**
och hon sa att Anna var f– Anna var stor nu för att klara
sig själv och det och hennes pappa var mest bortrest sådär
7. SUE: vad var det för liten kille du prata om då?
8. Sara: näe he de=
9. SUE: =Ida vem var den där lille killen?
10. Ida: ((Rycker på axlarna och himlar med ögonen.))
11. Sara: det var ingen liten kille då men det var–
12. Mia?: s- s-
13. SUE: det var en vux– ja
14. Mia: det var hennes sambo då
15. SUE: javisst förstår du um:
16. Mia: [hon brydde sig bara om– a:h a:h]
17. SUE: [mamma och pappa var ju– var ju skilda] och så där
18. Mia: hon brydde sig ju bara om honom hela tiden
19. SUE: hmhm ja
20. Dan: som en liten bäbis
21. SUE: ja det tyckte hon ju det va– va tänkte som–
Anna hon tänkte ju som så att mammor och pappor dom
tyckte v– tycker väl alltid bäst om sina barn
22. Sara: ja:
23. SUE: för det trodde ju hon i alla fall
24. Sara: ja:

[6]

Group 4B:2. Participants: Julia, Sara, Mia, Ida (girls), Dan (boy) and SUE (teacher). Book: *Smuggelkatten* by Lasse Ekholm.
(Tape 3: 0.53.51. I.e. over 15 minutes from start.)

1. SUE: ja det låter spännande men nu får vi ta och vi– tänka till
litet på våran bok då ja då har vi fått klart för oss att
pappan var väldigt snäll
2. ?: ja:
3. ?: um:
4. SUE: och mamman var?
5. Dan: inte så snäll

- 6.→ SUE: ja fast det sa hon ju inte fast hon hade bara inte så mycket tid för henne just nu
7. Dan?: um:
8. SUE: [den här-]
9. Sara: [nej men] det verka ju som att hon va väldigt- hann inte så här va- brydde sig så mycket-
10. SUE: nej=
11. Sara: =inte var så snäll
12. SUE: och det framkom ju även tidigt i boken, när Anna tyckte ju att det bästa med att åka till Grekland, förutom Drama-
13. Mia: hihi
14. SUE: -det var ju att? um
15. Mia: hon slapp mamma och att hon slapp-
16. SUE: ja:=
17. Sara: =[den där killen!]=
18. Mia: =[liksom å vara med]-
19. SUE: ja:
20. Mia: -att hon var med den där killen
21. SUE: och att hon istället fick vara tillsammans med?
22. Mia: ja
23. Sara: [sin pa]ppa
24. SUE: [pappa!]
25. Mia: sin pappa som var jättesnäll
- 26.→ SUE: °jha° fast han- hon tyckte ju samtidigt att han var lite jobbig
27. Mia & Sara: ja
28. SUE: kommer du ihåg Ida varför hon tyckte han var lite jobbig?
29. Ida: ((Skakar på huvudet.))
30. Dan?: ne:j
31. SUE: Julia?
32. Julia: °för han tittade nästan hela tiden på gamla ruiner och sen var lite konstig för (xx) stenhögar (x)°

[7]

Group 4A:2. Participants: Mats, Tony, Bert (boys), Inga (girl) and MARY (teacher). Book: *Hjälp! Boan är lös!* by Monica Zak.

(Tape 1: 0.39.55. I.e. 9 minutes from start.)

1. MARY: ((Tittar på Inga.)) du hade alltså tagit Isidora som en av huvudpersonerna? (.) hur var hon tycker du?
2. Inga: njae, inte speciellt noggrann med saker hur dom såg ut och så där [(xx) dansa (xx)]-
3. Mats: [hon dansar ju] i alla fall
4. MARY: ((Pekar från Mats till Inga.)) °(x) får vänta°
5. Inga: °(xx) dansade°
6. MARY: hon gillade å dansa och hon var inte speciellt noga med saker och ting ((Uppräknar karaktäristikan med fingrarna.))
7. Inga: näe
8. MARY: ((Riktar blicken mot Mats.)) vad tänker du mera på?
9. Mats: jag tänkte nog på dansade (.) hon– vad heter det, Hampus gick ju och gömde sig i skohyllan när Isi–Isidora satt på sig- satt på musiken
10. MARY: ((Nickar.))
11. Tony: (xx)
12. Mats: (xx)
13. MARY: har ni två funderat nånting på Isidora? ((Pekar på Bert och Tony.))
14. → Bert: (xx) (.) hon är väl– vad heter det– hon är väl inte så mogen (xx)-
15. → MARY: är hon en typisk mamma?
16. Flera: nä:e:
17. Bert: °nej ingen mamma°
18. MARY: hur är en typisk mamma då?
19. Inga: hon ska [tjata]
20. Bert: [tjatig]
21. MARY: jaha! (.) och det var inte Isidora?
22. Flera: nä:e:
23. Inga: (xx) så måste man inte göra vissa saker hemma så måste man städa rummet och så
24. MARY: det behövde inte Guttav göra
25. Inga: n-ä-e

26. MARY: hur får vi veta att det inte var så noga? var det genom– ehm– den här hunden ni fick veta det eller fick vi veta det på grund av nåt annat?
27. Inga: att hon inte var så där (.) med kläderna heller och så (.) det var inte direkt– med kläderna- och så heller (xx)
28. ((Åtta turer borttagna ur exemplet.))
29. MARY: och på det sättet får man då veta litet att hon kanske var ganska slarvig
30. Tony(?): °uhm°
31. MARY: jaha ja dammtussar det har nog jag hemma ibland också (.) har ni det?
32. Flera: ja
33. Mats(?): det har nog alla
34. Tony: hihi jag har såna härna stora ((Visar med händerna?))
35. MARY: hihi jaa! (.) jaha men mammor tjatar men det gjorde inte den här mamman

REALISM AND INTERTEXTUALITY IN SCHOOL BOOKTALK*

ABSTRACT In criticism of children's literature, notions of "fantasy" and "realism" are pivotal (Rose, 1993; Shavit, 1986). In a discourse study of school student's "booktalk" (Chambers, 1985/2000; 1993/1999), different notions of realism were recurrently invoked in teachers' and students' ways of talking about fictive events as: (i) lifelike, (ii) literal, or (iii) personal experience. The interface between life and text was related to intertextuality in a broad sense. In cases when so-called text-to-life interactions (Cochran-Smith, 1984/1994) were initiated by teachers or students, two types of risks were revealed. First, engagement was at times bought at the cost of quite literal reader responses. Moreover, students sometimes resisted text-to-life probing, but volunteered privileged information about their parents, displaying different notions from teachers about legitimate information in a school context. There were thus delicate balancing problems between privacy and engagement, and between text and life.

* Eriksson, K. & Aronsson, K. (Submitted for publication.)

“Who are you?” said the Caterpillar. This was not an encouraging opening for conversation. Alice replied, rather shyly, “I—I hardly know, Sir, just at present—at least I know who I was when I got up this morning, but I think I must have been changed several times since then. “What do you mean by that?” said the Caterpillar, sternly. “Explain yourself!” “I ca’n’t explain myself, I’m afraid, Sir,” said Alice, “because I’m not myself, you see.”
(Carroll, 1866/1997, p. 56)

Introduction

In children’s literature, a tradition of blurring the boundaries between reality and fantasy dates back to 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). Some texts have an equivocal or *ambivalent* (Shavit, 1986) 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*). Blurred boundaries are characteristic for such ambivalent texts. *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), the heroine was portrayed as someone who had merely dreamt her adventures.

Other prototypical ambivalent texts are, for instance, A. A. Milne’s *Winnie-the-Pooh* (not the Walt Disney version, which is adapted for children) or Tove Jansson’s *Moomin* stories. Ambivalent texts are believed to require more experienced readers in that the fictive events can, for instance, be seen “real” or “unreal” depending on the reader. In her discussion of a school adaptation of Barrie’s multivoiced children’s version of *Peter Pan*, Rose (1993) shows how the didactic version invokes a single invisible third

person narrator (p. 67). In contrast, Barrie's own version involved language play and parody, literary tropes and multiple perspectives, invoking complex notions of "fantasy" and "reality".

The discussions of Rose (1993) and Shavit (1986) are theoretical. In our present work, we wish to move beyond theory and investigate if and how children themselves invoke notions of "realism" in their reader responses to literature for children. There is a notable dearth of research on children's readings of literature, and in what ways it differs from the readings of adults (Shavit, 1986, pp. 69–70); but for an ethnographic case study of young children's reading see Wolf and Heath (1992).

This study concerns notions of "the real" in children's reader responses in group discussions in a school context. In a naturalistic study of so-called booktalk sessions (Chambers, 1985/2000, 1993/1999), it was found that both teachers and school students often invoked notions of "reality" when moving between fiction or literary experience (texts), on the one hand, and lived experience (life), on the other. We would like to argue that such notions are intimately related to intertextuality.

Kristeva (1967) coined the term "intertextuality" in her introduction of the writings of Bakhtin. It can be defined in a restricted or radical way: "In its most restricted acceptance (Genette), the term designates the relation(s) between one text and other ones which are demonstrably present in it. In its most general and radical acceptance (Barthes, Kristeva), the term designates the relation between any text (in the broad sense of signifying matter) and the sum of knowledge, the potentially infinite network of codes and signifying practices that allows it to have meaning." (Prince, 1987, p. 46) Drawing on Bakhtin, Kristeva (1967) argues 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. All texts can thus be read in a space defined by three dimensions (author–reader–context): "any text is

constructed as a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another. The notion of *intertextuality* replaces that of intersubjectivity, and poetic language is read as at least *double*.” (Kristeva, 1967, pp. 440–441; Kristeva & Moi, 1986, p. 37) Her writing on intertextuality also contains an attack on binary or essentialistic Aristotelian logic (e.g. categorizing the world as true:untrue) which can not explain the dialogism of polyphonic texts, e.g. the works of Rabelais, Dostoevsky, Joyce or Proust (see also Allen, 2000; Kristeva, 1967). We would also argue that such essentialist logic cannot explain, for instance, *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*.

Like in some other recent research on intertextuality (e.g., Cochran-Smith, 1984/1994; Lemke, 1992; Short, 1992), our present definition of intertextuality is even broader, including references both to other texts and to everyday experience (life), what Chambers (1993/1999, p. 19) has called *world-to-text* connections, that is, bringing the extra-textual world, our own world to the text, thereby expanding the meaning of one or both. There are several studies relevant to such a discussion of intertextuality. In a pioneering investigation, Heath (1983/1991) analyzed literacy introduction in three different communities. These communities embraced different local practices and attitudes in relation to books and reading, and in relation to literal versus imaginative or nonserious readings of texts and events.

Cochran-Smith conducted a field study in an American nursery school, investigating what was later to become the title of her monograph: *The Making of a Reader* (1984/1994). Her findings show that adults transformed young preschool children into readers long before they could recognize text or write. The pervasive presence of various literacy events was one factor underlying this socialization into literacy. Cochran-Smith used the concept “literacy event” analogously to Heath: “occasions in which the talk revolves around a piece of writing” (Heath, 1983/1991, p. 386). One such literacy event was storyreading. In an analysis of 100

storyreading events, Cochran-Smith (1984/1994, p. 169) distinguished between two types of intertextuality: *life-to-text* and *text-to-life*. Most of the interactions during storyreading involved adults helping young preschoolers to understand particular *texts* through allusions to “real life” and various kinds of extra textual information: what Cochran-Smith calls life-to-text interactions, in which “the storyreader 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 socialized into how to use literature for making sense of everyday *life* (Cochran-Smith, 1984/1994, pp. 169–173). When reading Mercer Mayer’s *There’s a Nightmare in my Closet*, the teacher, for instance, encouraged the children to talk about having nightmares and being afraid of darkness. Cochran-Smith studied preschoolers and her study does not document any examples of intertextuality in a restricted sense, that is, references to other written texts. However, she documented many examples of life-to-text and text-to-life references.

As yet, little empirical work has been done on intertextuality and children’s reader responses. One exception is Short (1992) who studied literature circles in grades 1–6 in both rural and urban settings in the Midwest and the Southwest of US. Her study was motivated by what she saw as a dearth of work on intertextuality in authentic contexts. She conducted her studies as an active co-learner, teacher and researcher. The children in her study discussed intertextual references of all types, literary elements, illustrations, references to the authors’ life as well as their own

personal experiences. Short thus adopted a broad notion of intertextuality (cf. Lemke, 1992).

In an ethnographic case study of two young sisters (in the format of a reading diary over six years), Wolf and Heath (1992) have documented how there was a complex interplay between children's literature and their life and play. The two girls, for instance, employed phrases from children's book when protesting against their parents (p. 110). Also, literature was woven into their sociodramatic play in complex ways.

Moreover, Davies (1989b) has shown that, in readings of emancipatory tales, even 5-year-old preschoolers, are able to discuss complex topics, such as gender, drawing both on texts and on their own lived experience. In another investigation with a gender focus, Yeoman (1999) studied ways in which 9- to 11-year-old children were able to create disruptive stories, integrating classical fairy tales with films, plays, and critical classroom discussions into novel stories that transcended race or gender stereotypes. In the children's own disruptive stories, Little Red Riding Hood was, for instance, transformed into a "musclewoman" who gave the wolf a punch, and Cinderella was retold from the perspective of the "supposed evil stepsister", who revealed that Cinderella, in fact, dressed up in order to vamp the prince, who was the legitimate beau of the stepsister. Yeoman (1999, p. 429) drew on a broad underlying notion of intertextuality, referring to texts of all kinds, including television scripts and other types of visual culture, and implicitly, also lived experience. Other researchers on children's literature have employed a somewhat narrower notion of intertextuality, reserving it for connections between proper texts from different media, not including lived experience (Sipe, 2000, p. 77).

In a study on adult female romance readers, *Reading the Romance*, Radway (1984/1991) interviewed a bookshop salesclerk and 16 of her regular customers. Additionally, Radway collected questionnaire data from 42 more customers. In their evaluation of the romances, the women required a realistic setting. Yet, the plot

should be more extraordinary than regular life, as long as it involved excitement, happiness and/or success. In sum, the setting should thus be “factually correct”, but the lives of the people in the book should be happier and more exciting than the lives of the readers (Radway, 1984/1991, p. 109).

Fish (1980/1998) has not studied the reading of school age children, but he has produced a theoretical background for understanding constructivist reading. He claims that all communication, including the interpretation of texts, is situated. Texts only exist in relation to specific readers or communities of readers, and texts must always be interpreted in relation to the specific context at hand. Fish coined the notion *interpretive community* to denote people who share interpretative strategies. The notion of realism is intimately linked to an interpretive community in that it requires a group of people who operate with partly shared references or what Toni Morrison has called “shareable imaginative worlds” (1992; Yeoman, 1999).

The present study concerns school students, who are still learning how to read fiction in a literary manner, including how to relate texts to other texts and to life. In the following, booktalk sessions will be analyzed as a type of informal apprenticeship into the interpretive communities of schools and literary thinking. In particular, the analyses will focus on different notions of “real life” in the local co-creation of shareable imaginative worlds.

Setting and method

Booktalk procedures

In his discussion of adults’ roles in bringing children and literature together Chambers (1985/2000, p. 138), citing an 8 year-old student, claims that “we don’t know what we think about a book until we’ve talked about it”. Booktalk sessions are therefore important formative features of reader responses. Chambers (1993/1999) claims that in everyday discussions among friends, the

meaning of a film or other story, for a group of readers, partly emerges during conversations. In booktalk with children, it is possible to bring their worlds to the worlds of text, exploring the group's preferences (likes/dislikes), puzzles (what individual participants yet do not understand), and patterns (connections between and within texts).

The present study documents booktalk discourse at a Swedish school, the Valley school 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* (Swed. "läsecirklar") that were inspired by Chambers' (1985/2000; 1993/1999) approach. 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 students chose four books and arranged them according to their preferences. Later, their choices formed the basis for organization 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 students. S/he talked about the author and about the content of the story. In addition, the students 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 students took turns. As preparation for the second session, the students 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.

As discussed, Radway's readers (1984/1991) differentiated between setting and plot. The eight books read in the present study all have realistic settings. In four cases – *Kampen om Visby* [The Struggle for Visby] (Lindblad-Nelson, 1995), *Nikki – min vän*

grävlingen (Burkett, 1988/1989) [*The Year of the Badger* (Burkett, 1972/1985)] and *Isnatt* [Ice Night] (Sørllø, 1989) *Nonni och Manni* [Nonni and Manni] (J. Svensson & Telemann, 1989) – the plots are realistic as well. The plots of the remaining books are mainly realistic but contain fantasy elements.¹

Recordings, transcriptions², and coding

During one school year, the first author (KE) video-recorded 24 booktalk sessions (3 sessions/group). In all, the recordings involved 8 different groups of 3–8 students in 4 classes in grades 4–7, that is, students aged 10–14. Forty students (20 girls and 20 boys) and 5 teachers (4 women and 1 man) 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, the entire book club sessions were recorded. The present data consist of video-recordings of 24 teacher-led book club interactions.³

We have followed the recommendations of Potter and Wetherell (1995), making *in extenso* transcriptions of the entire data set. Thereafter, we have indexed the 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' explicit or implicit references to what is "real", including world-to-text references, occurred frequently in all book club sessions. All such occurrences were therefore systematically identified and transcribed in greater detail, covering overlaps, emphasis, loudness, pauses, and prolongation of sounds and latching. Finally, a native English-speaking professional translator has translated the chosen examples in collaboration with the authors. All names have been changed in order to maintain the participants' anonymity.

Intertextuality

In his booktalk approach, Chambers (1985/2000; 1993/1999) has issued a warning about posing overly broad questions such as “What is the meaning of this text?” or “Why did you like this book?”. Instead, he advocates talking about details in the text, and particularly what he calls “puzzles”, that is, things that the reader does not understand. Discussions in the present booktalk sessions covered a broad range of general issues, such as ruins, badgers, arctic climate, and talismans. The discussions were often quite lively, and both students and teachers puzzled on details in the text. In almost every session, the teacher thus tried to relate the read events to the students’ own experiences, focusing on how the students could apply a book’s content to their general life-world experiences or to their own personal life, for instance their experience of fear. What Chambers (1993/1999) called *world-to-text* connections were thus discussed in every session in the present data, and teachers as well as students invoked them.

In our data, intertextuality in a restricted sense was quite rare. On some occasions, the teacher or the students mentioned prior works by the same author. Yet, at large neither the teachers nor the students engaged in making literary references. In the data we identified seven references to other texts. The majority concerned other media: four of them concerned movies and two of them television programs. In fact, only one reference concerned another book and this reference was teacher initiated: “You know another person we’ve read about pretty recently comes easily to mind”. When talking about *Nonni and Manni*, a book about two Icelandic brothers, she referred to Astrid Lindgren’s *The Lionheart Brothers*.

It was found that the participants implicitly or explicitly oriented to “realism” in all groups. At large, we will explore the child readers’ own notions of what was “real”. It was found that notions of realism were often linked to the interface between text and life in

that texts were often situated in relation to possible or realistic events (“lifelike”), concrete events (“literal”), or lived experience (“personal”).

First of all, we will present a couple of examples, where the students *explicitly* discussed what was “real” or “unreal” (examples 1–3). Secondly, we will present a series of examples where the students own personal experiences were related to those of the fictive characters (examples 4–8), *implicitly* invoking notions of what was seen as “real”.

Lifelike events as “real”

In several sessions, the participants thus explicitly discussed in what ways texts were “real”, invoking notions of realism (“lifelike”), contrasting such notions with “fantasy”. In these discussions, “real events” (Swed. “verkliga händelser”) were often preferred to “unreal” events or the fantasy genre. On other occasions, they invoked notions of what “could have taken place”. The students thus did not necessarily draw on their own past experiences as standards of truth, but on what someone might have experienced, that is, their standard for evaluating a text was imaginable or *possible* lived experience, that is lifelike events, rather than lived experience *per se*. In the following, we will present two such cases (examples 1 and 2). The discussed book *Hjälp! Boan är lös* (Zak, 1987/1989) in example 1 is a realistic adventure story with some fantasy elements.

[1]

Group 4A:3. ** Participants: Inga, Mats, Bert, Tony, and MARY (teacher).
Book: *Hjälp! Boan är lös* [Help! The Boa is Loose] by Monica Zak.
(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

** Group 4A:3 = grade 4, group A, session 3.

When asked by their teacher whether the book is “real”, two students, Mats and Inga, end up discarding the book as “unreal” (turns 4 and 5). Yet, 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 realistic experience. In telling the students that the book is not all that “unreal”, she can be seen to try to make it more attractive to the students. There is evidently an underlying assumption that “unreal” texts are less interesting than authentic ones. 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).⁴

[2]

Group 7B:3. Participants: Pia, Lisa, Elias, Ulf, Nils, Klas and ALLAN (teacher). Book: *Pojken och den vita sköldpaddan* (*The Silent One*) by Joy Cowley. (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

In the book sessions studied, the teachers frequently tried to evoke identification between students and same-aged fictive characters. In this example, the teacher first initiates a discussion about what would have happened if “you were the boy” and the events in the book had actually taken place. This can be described as a text-to-life interaction, using Cochran-Smith’s (1984/1994) terminology. Ulf and Nils both answer that one would have died (turns 2 and 3), while 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 students understand that they would actually die if they jumped off a boat like the main character. On an underlying level, the teacher can be seen to explain to them that they would hurt themselves, or even die, if they tried what they read about. The teacher’s cautioning remarks are quite natural in a school context, as teachers can be held accountable for what is recommended in schools. School time fiction is therefore, at times, subordinated to superordinate safety goals. 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, 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 students pick up in ways that magicians, poets or bards cannot. In a discussion of educational dilemmas, 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.

Another aspect of what is lifelike or “real” is what is seen as *illusory* or deeply engaging.

[3]

Group 6A:3. Participants: Lena, Gerd, Rut, Siv, Dora, Bo, Paul, Sten and MARY (teacher). Book: *Eldens hemlighet (Secrets in the Fire)* by Henning Mankell. (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 students about what made the “greatest impression” in their reading, Rut speaks about how the fictive events were so “real that you could see pictures like though there weren't any”, and Gerd speaks about film-like qualities. The “lifelike” or illusory mimetic quality of a text is evidently an important aspect of what creates high involvement for the students concerned (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 she just “couldn't stop reading” (turn 6). In these three comments, the readers apparently referred to “lifelike” or realistic qualities that create illusions of living the text. Realistic or “lifelike” texts can thus be seen to create deep involvement.

Literal events as “real”

In some cases, as in example 1 and 3, the students and/or teachers explicitly discussed whether events were “real” or “unreal”. In other examples such discussions were implicit. Yet, the responses revealed quite literal notions of what is “real” (examples 4–5).

In the first of these two discussions, the teacher had just encouraged the students to turn to the illustration on page 55 of the target book (Ekholm, 1990), a black-and-white ink drawing. On an entire page, the grandmother, in the foreground, is looking down at the enormous cat Drama in his cage, and Anna and her father are depicted in the background.

[4]

Group 4B:3. Participants: Julia, Sara, Mia, Ida, Dan, and SUE (teacher).

Book: *Smuggelkatten* [The Smuggled Cat] by Lasse Ekholm.

(Tape 4: 0.20.29.)

1. SUE: Grandma then (.) how does she look? (1) Julia
2. Julia: °she looks e- scared°
3. SUE: y [e:s]
4. Julia: [°a] little uncertain°
5. SUE: yeah that's for sure (.) hum
6. ?: °xx°
7. SUE: but then then she didn't want to make Anna unhappy
either so what did she say then?
8. Sara: ((Raises her hand to answer.))
9. SUE: ((Nods towards Sara.)) uh huh-
10. Sara: that it was good that the cat was there 'cause it changed
her life she said
11. SUE: yes she thought it was very elegant she said and it was
really big and so she was a little afraid of it and then she
said am I really getting such a fine present? hum
[and she really was going to]
12. Dan: [I wonder how she felt about it] really
13. SUE: yes I wondered about that too (.)
14. Sara: then she [thought well] that well
15. SUE: [what do you-] ((Looks at Dan.))
16. SUE: what do you think she really thought (.) then (.) at first
((Looks at Dan.))
17. Dan: I (.) think
18. Dan: I think she didn't think it was so great
19. SUE: uh huh
20. Dan: uh- she she probably hadn't wished for a cat exactly
21. SUE: °no she hadn't° (.) and why then do you think she didn't
say no to Anna?
22. Dan: ehuh then woul- I think probably x wouldn't want to
make her unhappy
23. → SUE: °I think so too° (.) would your grandmother do the same
thing?
24. Dan: no:

25. SUE: if you gave her a big dog? (.) would she accept it just so
you wouldn't become unhappy?
26. Dan: no she wouldn't 'cause she's allergic
27. SUE: well then that was a bust

Initially, the teacher asks the students how Grandma looks (turn 1). In so doing, she can be seen to orient both to the illustration and to the text. Julia spontaneously responds that grandma looks "afraid". The teacher acknowledges her response, in a hesitant manner ("yeah"), indirectly signalling that she is not completely satisfied with it. Julia's response evidently only draws on the illustration, not on both the text and the illustration.

In her second question (turn 7), the teacher actually directs the students to the text, and not to the illustration alone, when she asks about what grandma "said", that is, to something that cannot be inferred from the illustration. Finally, she engages in a type of perspective setting (turn 23), contextualizing the reading in terms of text-to-life references, when asking about how Dan's grandmother would react, trying to invoke the students' own experiences. Yet, Dan responds in terms of what his grandmother would do in concrete, literal terms, not what she would do in order to please her grandchildren. As can be seen, the teacher initiates a repair sequence when asking for a clarification after Dan's first "no", as if she does not quite accept his response. After Dan's account ("no she wouldn't 'cause she's allergic", turn 26), she accepts his response. Yet, she is perhaps orienting, not so much to what grandmothers would literally do in concrete instances, but to what grandmothers would do if they were able (a preferred response might have been "she would have accepted my dog, but she couldn't cause she's allergic"). Like literature, booktalk concerns fictive worlds, and not only what is given in concrete instances. Yet, in this instance, Dan only orients to the concrete world, and to his actual, concrete grandma who would not accept a dog.

In the present booktalk sessions, both lower and higher-grade students presented quite literal responses. In a second example, it can be seen how a boy in grade 6 similarly responded in quite a concrete mode. His book club discussed *Secrets in the fire* (Mankell, 2000), a story that takes place in Mozambique. The main character, Sofia, her sister Maria, and their mother are refugees. By accident, the heroine has stepped on a land mine and lost both her legs, and her sister was killed by the blast wave:

[5]

Group 6A:3. Participants: Lena, Gerd, Rut, Siv, Dora, Bo, Paul, Sten and MARY (teacher). Book: *Eldens hemlighet* (*Secrets in the Fire*) by Henning Mankell. (Tape 11: 0.56.15.)

1. MARY: so that the- there were lots of thoughts going through her head and sometimes she sat down and pulled the blanket over her head and refused to eat and didn't want to answer (.) why do you think she did this?
2. Sten: well she be- she thought it was her fault that Maria ((her sister)) was dead
3. Bo: °she wanted to be invisible°
4. MARY: yes, Bo what did you say then?
5. Bo: she wanted to be invisible
6. → MARY: and it was probably at times like this when she- we usually say that people are depressed, they don't want to talk to anyone (.) when you don't want to talk to anyone, when you feel like ugh! everything's so hard now what do you all do?
7. Dora: I sit quietly
8. Rut: shut myself in my room
9. Sten: I can't
10. MARY: you can't
11. → Sten: we have lots of flexes from my room so you can't shut the door

The teacher, Mary, tries to elicit a text-to-life response, invoking the students' own lived experience of not wanting to talk to anyone, trying to draw on the students' experiences of enclosing themselves. Dora and Rut both report personal experiences of enclosing oneself in one's room, whereas Sten (turns 9 and 11) reports that he cannot do so, as there are too many flexes running through the door to his room. Again, a discussion about complex feelings is reduced to concrete obstacles (this time a lot of flexes, not Grandma's allergy). On a somewhat speculative note, Sten's way of answering in a very concrete way can perhaps be interpreted as a resistance towards overly intrusive questions. Whether the teacher sees Sten's concrete answer as a resistance or not, she turns towards someone else with her questions.

In this example, as well as the prior one, the two boys involved oriented themselves to concrete details in their private lives, not to human ambivalence or complex feelings evoked by the literature. Real life references are tricky; they are often ambiguous in that the students may orient to a literal or to a literary meaning of book-talk. Obviously, the type of discussion that follows a literal reading is quite distinct from the nonliteral reading of a fictive or literary approach.

In both cases of literal responses (examples 4 and 5), the two boys can be seen to relate to the life-world as such, rather than to the interface between text and life. It can thus be seen how what is a text-to-life interaction in booktalk is, ultimately, an interactional affair, in that it is only possible to enter into the interface between text and life if two parties choose to relate both to the text and to the life-world.

Personal events as "real"

In their booktalk sessions, teachers and students covered broad areas of everyday life, discussing everyday hassles and hardships, as well as love and death. In these discussions, the group could be

seen to form a local community with a partly shared joint biography, where the participants knew quite a lot about each other, and also about each others' imaginative worlds. Four of the eight books discussed in the book clubs featured animals as central figures and several discussions focused on family pets and other animals. As discussed, the teacher recurrently invoked the students' lived experiences of the world (cf. examples 3–5), eliciting text-to-life references. In so doing, s/he could be seen to draw on concrete experiences. To varying degrees, such experiences also involved personal aspects of the children's lives. In other cases, the teacher directly elicited personal life-to-text information through specific questions about the children's lives or the children themselves volunteered personal information (examples 6–8).

[6]

Group 4A:3. Participants: Inga, Mats, Bert, Tony, and MARY (teacher).

Book: *Hjälp! Boan är lös* [Help! The Boa is Loose] by Monica Zak.

(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°

As can be seen, the teacher invites text-to-life interactions by asking the students 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 ("um", turns 10, 12 and 14). This can be interpreted as if she had hoped for responses that concerned sacrifice or other activities that were more specifically related to "doing everything for one's pet" as in the fictive world of the hero, who even smuggles his rare boa boa back to Guatemala.

Some discussions about personal life 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.

[7]

Group 4B:2. Participants: Julia, Sara, Mia, Ida, Dan, and SUE (teacher).

Book: *Smuggelkatten* [The Smuggled Cat] by Lasse Ekholm.

(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
22. Mia: ((Shakes her head.))
23. SUE: no:
24. Mia: but it was full of cat hair

As can be seen, two of the participants, Mia and Dan, spontaneously and gleefully report on their fathers' smuggling of alcohol (turns 10–20), thus initiating text-to-life interactions. 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 most parents would probably not want their children to reveal at school details of their past smuggling. It can be noted that the students, not the teacher, initiated the topic of smuggling in the students' personal life experiences. Potter and Wetherell (1994) have discussed how hypothetical variation might clarify discursive meaning. On a speculative note, the teacher in the present example could have asked the students about the smuggling habits of their parents. Such questioning about private matters would however, have been seen as offensive and overly intrusive to the adults involved (the absent parents as well as the teacher).

In contrast to the students' gleeful discussion of their parents' smuggling – an aspect of *their parent's* private worlds – we can, in the final example (below), inspect how the students react to the teacher's investigation of one aspect of the students' own private lives, their ways of helping out at home. It can be seen how the students reacted with resistance to questions about *their own* private worlds, here their ways of helping out at home.

[8]

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

1. ((Bo and Dora are whispering to each other.))
2. MARY: when you read about them Bo did you wonder? these girls had to go out and work first a- a- a- and then they could go (1) and (3) go to school
3. Bo: <m>
4. MARY: you thought that sounded fine?

5. Bo: <ye:s>
6. MARY: but you thought that was fine?
7. Bo: yes
- 8.→ MARY: if you were put in that situation (.) that you
9. Bo: uh huh
10. MARY: had to work first and go to school later
11. Bo: uh huh
12. MARY: would that be a good arrangement for you?
13. Bo: but school was in the afternoons
14. MARY: yes
15. Bo: °<ye'ah> (.)it would be okey°
16. 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
17. Bo: but they still got up that early even if they didn't go to
school
18. MARY: what does Gerd have to say, you're smiling a bit when Bo
talks like that hehe
19. Gerd: well right I mean we've got it real good if you like think
about it
- 20.→ 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?
21. ((All students but Bo and Sten raise their hands.))
- 22.→ MARY: what do you do at home Siv?
23. Siv: all sorts of things bu- different
24. ((Bo and Dora are whispering and scribbling.))
25. MARY: do you help out every day?
26. Siv: yeah hehe I guess I do
27. MARY: I'd like to say to Bo ((Dora looks up.)) and Dora- you
probably haven't done these kinds of things before but
one real nice thing is if you wouldn't do other stuff ((Bo
stops scribbling and straightens himself up.)) while we're
working on this
28. Dora: um
29. Bo: um
30. MARY: do you help out every day?

31. Siv: (xx) hehe
32. MARY: really how much time does it take what you help out with at home?
33. Siv: it depends sometimes it takes more time
34. MARY: and what is more time?
35. Siv: ((Laughs.)) not so long
36. MARY: an hour (.) two hours
37. Siv: one at least (it takes) tee
38. MARY: it takes at least one hour (.) every day
39. Rut: (xx?) ((Giggles.))
40. Siv: no: hehe I don't (.) know it depends
41. → MARY: Dora helps around the house too (.) do you help out every day?
42. Dora: no at weekends
43. MARY: how
44. Dora: weekends
45. MARY: yes
46. Dora: laundry
47. → MARY: you do the laundry (.) yes well- that sounds good (.) Bo how do (.) you help out at home?
48. Bo: °uh° not so much
49. MARY: not so much but you could imagine helping out eight hours a day
50. Bo: uhm ((Shakes his head slightly.))
51. ((Several students laugh.))
52. Siv?: eight hours?
53. MARY: yes- fr- from six in the morning till two is eight hours right
54. Siv?: ((Giggles.))
55. MARY: just like these girls helped out
56. Bo: no
57. MARY: no (.) maybe so

In this episode, the teacher apparently tries to set a new perspective on the students' own lives, encouraging the participants to compare their lives with that of refugee girls in Mozambique, taking the perspective of other persons, apparently trying to elicit what Cochran-Smith (1984/1994) called text-to-life interactions.

She explicitly calls on Bo (turns 8–12), Lena (turn 20), Siv (turn 22), Dora (turn 41), and ultimately Bo for a second time (turn 47). Yet, as can be seen, all four students display different types of resistance to the teacher's detailed questions about their helping out at home. Bo evades the question by answering in a literal manner (turn 13), and Lena does not respond at all (turn 20–21). Siv and Dora provide minimal and noncommittal responses (turns 23 and 42), avoiding the underlying core question of whether they would like to work before school.

It is not possible to conclusively determine why the students react with resistance, but most likely, their resistance has to do with their notions of what is private or public. 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 students' 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 student 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. Again, it can be seen, how the teacher alone cannot decide whether a text-to-life initiative will indeed develop into an exploration of the interface between text and life.

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 real 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 students 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.

On other occasions, however, the students 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 an interactional affair, part of the booktalk collaboration.

Discussion

Both teachers and students displayed an implicit and, at times, explicit preference for realistic literature, that is, non-fantasy texts or texts that did not appear to be unreal. Texts were thus assessed in relation to different standards for what was seen as “real”: e.g. lifelike, literal, or personal lived experience. In all these cases, “real life” or the extra-textual world was seen by students (and, at times, teachers) as an explicit or implicit norm for an engaging text.

In the present booktalk practices, the teachers recurrently tried to bridge the gap between life and texts by invoking the students’ lived experiences in order both to understand the *text* (life-to-text references), or to show the students how to relate a message in a book in order to better understand their own *life*, that is, text-to-life references in the terminology of Cochran-Smith (1984/1994). Yet, when trying to apply these notions to the present data, it was found that, for instance, text-to-life initiatives, on the teacher’s part did not always develop into an exploration of the interface between text and life. Whether booktalk did, in fact, develop into an exploration of intertextuality was often a sequential affair, part of the dialogue as such. What Morrisson (1992) called shareable imaginative worlds were thus truly dialogical affairs.

Booktalk discussions covered broad areas, including, for instance, moral issues (e.g. loyalty) and a series of other life-world phenomena. In many cases, “lifelike” qualities in the text apparently created an involvement with the text as such, making it engaging. Yet, teachers’ initiations of text-to-life issues, at times,

involved pedagogical risks or problems of balancing text and life, in that life issues became more absorbing than text issues. Chambers (1993/1999, p. 112) comments on the necessity of *bringing students back to the text*. In the present data, world-to-text references, at times, could be seen to “take over” text discussions as it were, obscuring feelings, attitudes or other abstract issues that the teacher tried to discuss, in that students sometimes answered in quite a concrete manner, producing literal rather than literary responses to fiction.

The teacher, at times, explored the students’ personal life-experiences. Another risk taking or balancing problem concerned the boundaries between classroom discourse and private life. Chambers has discussed how it is important that both students and teachers agree that everything is honorably 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 students 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. Apparently, there is a delicate balancing problem between exploiting text-to-life interactions, on the one hand, and maintaining an appropriate social distance, respecting students’ privacy, on the other. By bringing the students’ personal, and even private, life-world experiences into the classroom, the teacher, at times, transgressed the boundaries between public and private affairs. Yet, they did not always understand what constituted sensitive vs. non-sensitive information for the students themselves. 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 students' resistance to specific areas of investigation, such as the questions about household chores. When the literary text is seen to be employed didactically as a way of enlightening students, or as a type of "character training" (cf. Billig et al., 1988), students may react against the moral messages involved. Literature discussions have often involved "moral ideology" (Eagleton, T., 1996; Love, 2001). In booktalk sessions, moral issues may create high involvement. Yet, students may also react negatively to moral didactic dimensions. 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 fictive worlds, it is not possible to talk without simultaneously talking about lived realities.

Notes

1. Drawing on the definition of fantasy as "involving the supernatural or some other unreal element" (Carpenter & Prichard, 1984, p. 181).

2. Transcription symbols are mainly based on conversation analysis and discursive psychology (Edwards, 1997).

[] Square brackets mark the start and end of overlapping speech.

Underlining Signals emphasis; the extent of underlining within individual words locates emphasis.

Bold Pronunciation differs from surrounding speech, e.g. irony, theatrical.

CAPITALS Mark speech that is obviously louder than surrounding speech.

◦ ◦ Quieter speech.

(4) Measure pauses in seconds.

(.) Micropause.

((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 example.
 (text) Uncertain interpretation.
 (x) (xx) Inaudible word or words.
 hehe Laughter.

3. Due to technical mistakes the recordings lack sound in three cases (5A:1, 5B:2 and 6A:1). In all, 21 book sessions were transcribed.

4. 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) 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. (See also Tucker, 1999.)

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Appendix. Swedish originals

[1]

Group 4A:3. Participants: Inga, Mats, Bert, Tony, and MARY (teacher).

Book: *Hjälp! Boan är lös* by Monica Zak. (Tape 2: 0.23.56.)

1. → MARY: den här boken ((*Det försvunna vraket*)) nu som du talar om eh tycker du att den är verklig eller märker man att det är fantasi?
2. Mats: tycker att den var rätt så 'är erh både och °faktiskt°
3. → MARY: hur är den här boken då ((Tar upp *Hjälp! Boan är lös* och håller den framför sig.)) då är den verk [lig eller är den-]
[>den e överklig<]
4. Mats:
5. Inga: jae överklig
6. Bert: (xx)
7. MARY: båda delarna tycker du Bert när Mo–
8. Inga: (xx) det här
9. MARY: ja– när Monica Zak var hos oss så berätta hon faktiskt att hon kände till att man hade smugglat in till Sverige ormar ifrån Sydamerika

[2]

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

(teacher). Book: *Pojken och den vita sköldpaddan* by Joy Cowley.

(Tape 7: 0.31.04.)

1. → ALLAN: vad beror då på- alltså om om man tänker att att ((Harklar sig.)) det var du som hade varit den här pojken nu då och du hade dragits ner under vattnet och försvunnit där (.) och man åker runt och letar, om man inte hittar er, vad tror ni skulle hända i verkligheten så att säga om det nu inte var så att
2. Ulf?: man skulle [dö]
3. Nils: [drun]kan
4. Pia: (1) neä
5. Boy: man kan ju (xx)
6. Pia: om (han) är bra på att simma skulle han nog inte dö

7. ALLAN: fast hur- fast hur- läng [e- hur länge=
8. Elias?: [(xx)]
9. Nils?: [(xx)] å:
10. ALLAN: =klarar man sig under vattnet utan luft då, även dom
bästa bästa fridykarna hur länge tror ni att dom klarar
sig under?
11. Ulf: tre minuter
12. Klas: max tre fyra minuter kanske
13. ALLAN: jag vet faktiskt inte exakt hur länge men det är inte- det
handlar om minuter alltså
[gör det ju]
14. Klas: [°u:m:°]
15. Ulf: ja:
16. ALLAN: kanske fem
17. Klas: °um fyra fem nåt sånt där° ((Harklar sig.)) men dom leta
ju ganska länge efter han
18. ALLAN: a:
19. Ulf?: ja
20. Pia: ja inte- °eller jag vet inte°
21. ALLAN: så man kan tänka sig att han dog då alltså?
22. Klas: °mm°
23. Ulf: °ja°
24. ALLAN: <(de va ett så)> det var ett svårt s- slut[det var inte- det
var inte]- det står inte vad som händer
25. Elias?: [(xx)]
26. Elias?: näe (x)
27. ALLAN: nej, det gjorde det inte
28. Klas: man får ju tänka (det sig) själv
29. ALLAN: ja, man får göra det men <du vet> det är ju erh (.)
intressant å höra vad ni tänker då
30. Elias: um

[3]

Group 6A:3. Participants: Lena, Gerd, Rut, Siv, Dora, Bo, Paul, Sten and MARY (teacher). Book: *Eldens hemlighet* by Henning Mankell.

(Tape 11: 0.46.46.)

1. MARY: vad säger du Rut vad var det som gjorde djupast intryck på dig då?
2. → Rut: det var så verkligt så det gick och se bilder typ fast det inte fanns nåra så x
3. MARY: Gerd då?
4. Gerd: ja också som Rut sa liksom man kunde nästan tänka sig vad som hände: (.) liksom (.) man kunde– det det var typ som som en film så här fast liksom °(den inte gjorde det)° och sen så vad heter det när dom misste så många så här dom misste ganska många på så kort tid och så (.) så det var ju lite synd om Sofia då
5. MARY: vad gjorde djupast intryck på dig då Lena?
6. → Lena: ja att den kändes så verklig så att man– det känns som att man var med i boken så jag kunde inte sluta läsa

[4]

Group 4B:3. Participants: Julia, Sara, Mia, Ida, Dan, and SUE (teacher).

Book: *Smuggelkatten* by Lasse Ekholm. (Tape 4: 0.20.29.)

1. SUE: Farmor ja (.) hur ser hon ut? (1) Julia
2. Julia: °hon ser e- rädd ut°
3. SUE: ja [:]
4. Julia: [°li]te tveksam°
5. SUE: ja det kan man nog säga (.) um
6. ?: °xx°
7. SUE: men så så ville hon ju inte göra Anna lessen heller så vad sa hon då?
8. Sara: ((Räcker upp handen för att svara.))
9. SUE: ((Nickar mot Sara.)) um-
10. Sara: att det var bra att katten var där för att den förändrade hennes liv sa hon

11. SUE: ja hon tyckte att den var väldigt stilig sa hon ju och den var ju stor och så var hon lite rädd för det och sen så sa hon sådär ska jag verkligen få en så fin present? um [och det skulle hon ju få]
12. Dan: [undra vad hon tyckte om det] egentligen
13. SUE: ja det undrade jag också du (.)
14. Sara: sen tycket [hon ju] då ju
15. SUE: [vad tror-] ((Titta på Dan.))
16. SUE: vad tror du att hon tyckte egentligen (.) då (.) först ((Tittar på Dan.))
17. Dan: ja (.) tror
18. Dan: jag tror att hon tyckte inte det var så bra
19. SUE: um
20. Dan: eh- hon hon hade nog inte önskat en katt precis
21. SUE: °nåe hon hade inte gjort det° (.) å varför sa hon inte nej då till Anna tror du?
22. Dan: euhm då sku- jag tror nog x inte skulle göra henne lessen
- 23.→ SUE: °det tror jag också°(.) skulle din farmor göra på samma sätt
24. Dan: neäj
25. SUE: om du gav henne en stor hund? (.) skulle hon ta emot den för att inte göra dig ledsen?
26. Dan: nej det skulle hon inte för hon är allergisk
27. SUE: jaha du då stöp det på det

[5]

Group 6A:3. Participants: Lena, Gerd, Rut, Siv, Dora, Bo, Paul, Sten and MARY (teacher). Book: *Eldens hemlighet* by Henning Mankell.
(Tape 11: 0.56.15.)

1. MARY: så att de- det var många tankar som gick igenom hennes huvud och ibland så satte hon sig och så drog hon den här filten över huvudet och vägrade äta och ville inte svara (.) vad tror ni att hon gjorde det för?
2. Sten: ja hon tr- hon tyckte att det var hennes fel att Maria ((Hennes syster.)) var död
3. Bo: °hon ville va osynlig°
4. MARY: ja, Bo vad säger du då?

5. Bo: hon ville va osynlig
6. → MARY: och det var nå såna här stunder när hon– vi brukar säga man är deprimerad, man vill inte prata med nån (.) när ni inte vill prata med nån, när ni känner att usch! nu är allting så jobbigt hur gör ni?
7. Dora: jag sitter tyst
8. Rut: stänger in sig i rummet
9. Sten: det kan inte jag
10. MARY: du kan inte
11. → Sten: vi har en massa sladdar från mitt rum så det går inte och stänga dörr'n

[6]

Group 4A:3. Participants: Inga, Mats, Bert, Tony, and MARY (teacher).

Book: *Hjälp! Boan är lös* by Monica Zak. (Tape 2: 0.09.58.)

1. → MARY: det var nåra av er som hade djur
2. Mats: jag har haft
3. Inga: um jag har inte
4. Tony: jag har
5. Bert: jag har
6. Inga: eller har (.) fast jag har på mitt land och så min kusin
7. MARY: gör man allt för sina djur?
8. Bert: jag gjorde det när jag hade det
9. Tony: jag får nog säga när vi hade ute mitt matbord på sommarn så här och om det kommer en katt och så jag säger när nån– vi som till exempel bara ska e:h om vi sitter inne och har en mus som är ute då tycker inte jag att man ska ha det ifall att nån katt eller så kommer och um han kanske kan komma in där i alla fall även om det är stängt
10. MARY: °u:m°
11. Mats: °måste skriva om då nu° jag hade ett marsvin
12. MARY: um-
13. Mats: men då då var så gammal det var– skulle fylla fem år å då va rätt (.) gammalt å sen så hade han nån sjukdom så vad heter det när vi var på semester vi skulle i alla fall avliva

- honom åka till doktorn då ja men sen så på semestern när han var hos mormor så dog han (.) så han fick ju dö själv
14. MARY: °um°

[7]

Group 4B:2. Participants: Julia, Sara, Mia, Ida, Dan, and SUE (teacher).

Book: *Smuggelkatten* by Lasse Ekholm. (Tape 3: 0.50.23.)

1. Sara: ja just det han hade ju- han hade ju själv smugglat in-
2. Mia: Ah
3. SUE: ja de hade ha-((Skrattande.))
4. Sara: tre flasker
5. SUE: men vilket var värst då? att smuggla en kissekatt eller å smuggla sprit? (.) vad sa dom (.) tullgubbarna där?
6. Mia: att eöh det var ju värre å smuggla in katten än å smuggla in sprit
7. SUE: (xx) det var gjorde nästan alla smuggla lite sprit
8. Mia: ja
9. SUE: det var ju inte nära stora mängder
- 10.→ Mia: det gjorde min pappa också
11. SUE: ja du det
12. Sara: ((Skrattar.))
- 13.→ Dan: det gör min pappa med
14. SUE: ja' först-
15. Mia: en hel väska full
16. SUE: en hel väska full
17. Dan: (x) (.) bland badhanddukarna la han dom
18. Mia: ja ((Fnittrar.))
19. Dan: och sen gjorde han simmadrasserna
20. Mia: ja så gjorde han med Alexanders badbyxor där proppa han in massor så dom var helt våta när vi kom hem för att det hade läckt ((Fnittrar.))
21. SUE: ja förstår men det var ingen katt i ert bagage när ni kom hem i alla fall
22. Mia: ((Skakar på huvudet.))
23. SUE: näej
24. Mia: fast det var fullt av katthår

[8]

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

(Tape 11: 0.21.28.)

1. ((Bo och Dora viskar till varandra.))
2. MARY: när du läste om dom här Bo funderade du? dom här tjejerna var alltså tvungna att gå ut och jobba först å– å– å– och sen så kunde dom få gå (1) och (3) gå till skolan
3. Bo: <m>
4. MARY: tyckte du att det lät bra?
5. Bo: <ja:h>
6. MARY: men du tyckte det var bra?
7. Bo: ja
- 8.→ MARY: om du skulle sätta dig in i den situationen (.) att du
9. Bo: um
10. MARY: skulle få jobba först och gå till skolan sen
11. Bo: um
12. MARY: skulle det va en bra lösning för dig?
13. Bo: men skolan var ju på eftermiddagen
14. MARY: ja
15. Bo: °<ja'a> (.) skulle det väl°
16. MARY: så du skulle inte ha nånting emot och jobba först från klockan sex på morronen och sen gå till skolan klockan två på eftermiddagen (.) jaha
17. Bo: men dom går ju ändå upp så tidigt även om dom inte gick i skolan
18. MARY: vad säger Gerd, du ler litegranna när Bo säger så där hihi
19. Gerd: mhallå vaddå vi har ju det väldigt bra om man tänker liksom efter
- 20.→ MARY: °u:m° (2) vad tycker du Lena? funderade du nånting på det? (1) tar vi bara för givet det här (.) att vi får gå till skolan å att vi inte behöver arbeta och hjälpa till hemma? (2) hur många av er hjälper till hemma?
21. ((Alla elever utom Bo och Sten räcker upp handen.))
- 22.→ MARY: vad gör du hemma Siv?
23. Siv: allt möjligt mä– olika
24. ((Bo och Dora viskar och kluddar.))
25. MARY: hjälper du till varje dag?

26. Siv: ja hihi det gör jag väl
27. MARY: jag skulle vilja säga till Bo ((Dora tittar upp.)) och Dora–
ni har ju inte varit med om såna här saker förut men en
sak är väldigt trevligt om man inte sysslar med annat ((Bo
slutar kludda och sträcker på sig.)) under tiden vi jobbar
med det här
28. Dora: um
29. Bo: um
30. MARY: hjälper du till varje dag?
31. Siv: (xx) hihi
32. MARY: jaha hur lång tid tar det det som du hjälper till med
hemma då?
33. Siv: det beror på ibland tar det längre tid
34. MARY: och vad är längre tid?
35. Siv: ((Skrattar.)) inte jättelänge
36. MARY: en timma? (.) två timmar?
37. Siv: en minst (tar det) the
38. MARY: minst en timma tar det (.) varje dag
39. Rut: (xx?) ((Fnittrar.))
40. Siv: ne:hihi jag vet (.) inte det beror på
- 41.→ MARY: Dora hjälper också till hemma (.) hjälper du till varje
dag?
42. Dora: näe helgerna
43. MARY: hursa
44. Dora: helgerna
45. MARY: jaha
46. Dora: tvättar
- 47.→ MARY: du tvättar då (.) jaha– låter bra det (.) Bo då hur är det
med (.) din hjälp hemma?
48. Bo: °äh° det är inte så mycket
49. MARY: det är inte så mycket men du skulle kunna tänka dig att
hjälpa till åtta timmar om dan
50. Bo: uhm ((Skakar lätt på huvudet.))
51. ((Flera elever skrattar.))
52. Siv?: åtta timmar?
53. MARY: ja- fr- från sex till klockan två är ju åtta timmar
54. Siv?: ((Fnittrar.))
55. MARY: som nu dom här tjejerna hjälpte till
56. Bo: nej
57. MARY: näe (.) det kanske

CONCLUDING DISCUSSION

There are many doors to Fantastica, my boy. There are other such magic books. A lot of people read them without noticing. It all depends on who gets his hands on such books.
(Ende, 1983, p. 444)

The selection of books – Aidan Chamber’s first phase in the Reading Circle – was discussed in Chapter 4. It was striking that so many of the books chosen to promote reading were located in a setting foreign to Swedish pupils. This follows the syllabus, which states that fiction should increase understanding of other countries and cultural diversity. Another feature was that the majority of the books displayed non-nuclear family patterns. Is this choice of books a result of teachers’ thinking that divorce is an existential issue children can use literature to “deal with”? The absence of fathers is a bit curious. Might the authors feel that fathers are difficult to write about; is this why the fathers are “killed”?

Yet, a majority of the books (six out of eight) featured male heroes, and when the narrator’s gender was unknown, many of the child readers assumed that it was a male. A pattern of dominance of male main characters is predominant. Thus, girls still have to learn how to transgress gender when reading. And boys still do not get as much training in reading from the *Other’s* point of view.

Most of the books involved adventures of some kind, and half of them were about animals. Yet, several of the books simultaneously featured serious problems such as separation, suicide, betrayal, guilt,

jealousy and mortal danger. An important finding from this study emerged as soon as the data were collected, when I realised that deeply engaging literary discussions about love, death, loyalty, trauma, and loneliness were not particularly common in the video-recorded booktalk. Such discussions did occur at times, but they were generally more or less fragmentary. My first analytical work thus became to try to understand why such discussions did not materialise, that is, to understand what did *not* take place. In different ways, Chapters 5–7 examine both obstacles to deeper engagement and reader response in school booktalk.

In Chapter 5, I identified dilemmas that concerned the coordination of reading in a group context. A great deal of time was spent scheduling reading and talking about how many pages the pupils should read each day or how far they should proceed before the next session. This, at times, restricted the booktalk to concrete discussions. There was, thus, a dilemma between scheduled reading and reading for pleasure. Another dilemma concerning the spontaneity of the discussions was that the pupils had to consider not only their own reading, but also how far their classmates had read; there was thus a problem of synchrony. Finally, the obligation to read aloud and the possibility of being subjected to “fact-control” questions during the book discussions seemed to have inhibiting effects on in-depth conversations about the texts. In Chambers’ (1991/1996; 1993/1999) discussion of the reading circle, children are read to by an enabling adult as an essential means of helping them become book-readers. In a Swedish school context, though (as in the present school), it is quite common that pupils are called upon to read to each other. Such reading aloud is seen as a handy way of letting children practice reading skills. In the present booktalk sessions, competing educational projects thus sometimes overshadowed booktalk as such.

Children’s reader responses could be seen both in their talk on gender (Chapter 6) and in their ways of relating life to text (Chapter 7). Gender was made relevant in all book club sessions; the

teachers and pupils talked about ‘the guy’, ‘girls’, ‘the mum’ etcetera, and discussed the appropriate conduct of such gendered categories. In several cases, pupils as well as teachers oriented to gender in traditional and, at times, stereotyped ways. Yet, even non-traditional texts were sometimes discussed in traditional and stereotyped ways. The pupils, at times, did so, partly directed by their teachers’ questions. But the teachers and pupils also transcended gender stereotypes and expectations in several cases. In many such cases, though, there was a *generational pattern*, in that both groups tended to apply less traditional thinking when talking about their own age group.

Notions of what is “real” were often invoked in all of the eight book club series. Many discussions involved text-to-life interactions in a broad sense. Three different meanings of what is “real” were identified: (i) lifelike, (ii) literal, or (iii) personal experience. Yet, connections between fiction and “real” life were, at times, sacrificed at the cost of quite literal reader responses. Additionally, pupils sometimes resisted the teacher’s text-to-life questions about their own lives, but spontaneously exposed relatively sensitive information about their parents. Thus, the pupils displayed ideas about what was legitimate information in a school context different from those of their teachers. There was consequently a delicate problem of maintaining a balance between exploiting text-to-life connections and keeping social distance.

Do the above-mentioned problems and dilemmas imply that teachers and schools should not involve pupils in booktalk sessions? That would be too hasty a conclusion. I observed that the present pupils were in fact engaged in the book clubs; they all read the books chosen, and they participated in the discussions. Moreover, the analysis revealed that the present book clubs involved sharing individual readings of texts conversationally; they thus constituted meeting points between children and literature in which reader-response activities involved relating fiction to life.

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Appendix A Proposal of work plan for activities in the library

Proposal 980608

Work plan for library activities

The school's most important mission is to create good opportunities for pupils' language development. Language is a path to knowledge and is of fundamental importance for learning. In this work, The Valley School is investing in a well-equipped library. The library is computerised with regard to loaning books as well as searching its stock of books.

A literature pedagogue leads the library activities and elaborates them in collaboration with staff and pupils. The library is open during the entire school day. It will be staffed during certain hours and as per agreement. Pupil participation occurs through the school's library council/library assistants.

Library work is intended for grades K–7.

The pupils shall

- Have the opportunity to develop their imagination and delight in learning by reading literature.
- Encounter fiction, lay the foundation for good reading habits and become acquainted with parts of our cultural inheritance.
- Have the opportunity to “talk books” in small groups.
- Become accustomed to using the library's possibilities for searching facts and using aids, such as reference books, textbooks, periodicals and computers, in order to locate information.

“A number of computers are tied to the library. Communication, information searching, use of teaching programs as well as work with word processing programs are possible during the entire school day.”

Since The Valley School contains many activities, there are goals for children aged 0–5 years.

The pre-school's goals for reading are to

Arouse interest in books.

Stimulate imagination, feelings, thoughts and ideas.

Develop language.

Show the joy of experiencing/hearing a story.

Show that a message, content and meaning are hidden behind the letters.

Help children to feel joy through experiencing/hearing a story.

The open pre-school's goal is to

Arouse interest in books.

Literature for staff members' competence development is purchased annually through the library. Information meetings for staff are arranged to discuss library routines and information searching. Through “pedagogical meetings” the staff are given the chance to meet and “talk” books. There are possibilities for multi-media use as well as Internet communication.

Despite limited space, we have gone in for making the library “The Heart of the School”. The Little Hall and The Big Room offer possible places to work on library projects.

Appendix B Information letter to the pupils' parents

Linköping *date* 1998

To the parents of pupils in grades 4–7 at *The Valley School* in *Middle-sized Town*

At The Department of Child Studies, Linköping University, research is done to increase our knowledge of children's conditions and to allow us to understand how the surrounding world appears from a child perspective. One area of research at the department concerns children's ways of apprehending cultural expressions such as art, literature and TV.

With the permission of teacher-librarian *Mary Smith*, I will conduct a study of children's and young people's reading during school year 1998–99 at The Valley School. To gain insight into this, I intend to video-record some of the book clubs during the year (to separate the pupils' voices I need pictures as well as sound). During autumn term I will record four book groups and during spring I will record an additional two. The recorded material will be treated confidentially. This means, among other things, that no one outside the project will have access to the tapes, not now or in the future. Moreover, the results will be presented anonymously; people's names and the school name will be changed when I write about the study so that it will be impossible to determine who said what. The results will be presented in my doctoral thesis.

Participation in the study is voluntary. Participants can choose to discontinue participation at any time.

Notify the teacher or contact me by telephone or letter if you do not wish your child to participate in the study or if you have questions concerning it. If you have questions about the study, you are also welcome to contact my academic advisor, Prof. Karin Aronsson, at the following number xxx-xx xx xx.

Sincerely,

Katarina Eriksson

PhD student

Phone (Dept. of Child Studies): xxx-xx xx xx

Phone (home): xxx-xx xx xx

Address: Dept. of Child Studies
 Linköping University
 581 82 Linköping

Appendix C Information sheet about the book club

1998-09-xx

Book club in *grade 4*

You have now received your first book club book, and I hope you're pleased with the book you will read for the next 14 days. At our first meeting today we have gone through several practical details:

- plan your reading, "give the book time"
- take the book and your notes to every meeting
- do your homework assignments as well as you can

We hope you will like the book you are going to read. By the next meeting, *date*, we want you to have read approximately half of the book. **We will talk about the main characters in the book and what you think about them.** Maybe there is something in the book that you don't really understand. We can talk about that during this meeting.

When we meet for the last time, *DATE*, you should have finished reading the book. Tell the other group members **what you think about the book and try to describe why you think that way.** We also want **you to read a short section of the book** (about half a page). Practice so that you can read that section well and think about why you choose just that section.

Lennart

Bengt "Bengan"

Kerstin



Ann-Charlotte

Mary

1. Martin Kylhammar, *Maskin och idyll. Teknik och pastorala ideal hos Strindberg och Heidenstam*. (Diss.) 1985. ISBN 91-38-61645-9.
2. Cai Svensson, *The construction of poetic meaning. A cultural-developmental study of symbolic and non-symbolic strategies in the interpretation of contemporary poetry*. (Diss.) 1985. ISBN 91-40-05139-0.
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