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Booktalk Dilemmas: teachers' organisation of pupils' reading

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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.

Key words: *booktalk; dilemmas; discourse analysis; literature pedagogy*

INTRODUCTION

We don't know what we think about
a book until we've talked about it.

Aidan Chambers

BOOKTALK PRACTICES AND MOTHER-TONGUE TEACHING

The Swedish compulsory school subject “Swedish” (Svenska) includes both language and literature (Skolverket, 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 his/her 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, 1991, 1993), 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). To Chambers (1993), 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 *Readingtime* 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, 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, 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 (Edwards, 1997; Potter, 1996; Billig *et al.*, 1988). 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 & Potter, 1992; Edwards, 1997). 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, i.e. 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-recordings of such interactions. When I studied the tapes, I identified different problems in the practical accomplishment of ideal booktalk.

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* (*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, *i.e.* pupils aged 10-14); *i.e.* in total 24 book club sessions. Each session lasted about 30 minutes. Forty pupils (twenty girls and twenty boys) and five teachers (four women and one 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 (5A1:3, 5B2:3 and 6A1:3). 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, 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, pp. 12-14).

Another main source of inspiration of the book clubs at the Valley school was the reading development schedule (läsutvecklings-schemat, LUS) created by Sundblad *et al* (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" (bokslukaråldern). According to Sundblad *et al*'s definition of this period, the child reads a great deal *but* is limited to one genre. This stage is assumed (by Sundblad *et al*) 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; *i.e.*, facilitating a move into the third and more educated stage. In this matter, the reasoning of Sundblad *et al.* 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 seven or eight book titles to the pupils. The books presented were assumed by the teacher-librarian to be popular for the ages concerned, *i.e.* 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; *i.e.* 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 four to six groups of between three and eight 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" (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, *i.e.* exactly the type of readers that Chambers suggests should be challenged by an enabling adult to broaden their reading (1993, 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

Potter & 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 & Wetherell, 1994; Potter, 1998, pp. 136-37): *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 interesting. 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.

results

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 (läsutvecklingsschemat, LUS), which has been obligatory reading in the teacher program at several Swedish universities during the last years (Sundblad, Dominković & Allard, 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 (1991, 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, 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.

Excerpt 1

Group 4A:1 i.e. grade 4, group A, session 1). Participants: Inga, Mats, Bert, Tony, and MARY (teacher). Book: *Hjälp! Boan är lös!*⁴ by Monica Zak (1987). (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 ten in the morning and ten 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°

At the beginning of this sequence, the teacher accentuates that it is 'really good' (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', ('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' ('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 and 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.

Excerpt 2

Group 7A:2. Participants: Åsa, Eva, Anja, and MARY (teacher).
Book: *Isnatt* by Steinar Sørllle. (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’ (‘vi ska inte prata slutet än’) (turn 2). Her initial discount ‘yes but’ (‘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 – *i.e.* 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 *et al.* (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, *i.e.* 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).

Excerpt 3

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

Book: *Smuggelkatten* by Lasse Ekholm. (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 and 4). Chambers warns us about this type of book discussion, which he compares with an interrogation (1993, pp. 48-9). 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' ('karantän') (turn 6). Right after, Sara re-takes the turn but makes a slip of the tongue, 'quaractine' ('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?' ('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, 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 excerpt 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.

Excerpt 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: 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, ‘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 (*i.e.* 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 Tolstoy describes in his autobiographical work *Detstvo* [*Childhood*] (1952) how he eagerly devoted a childhood summer to reading French novels. That particular summer Tolstoy read about one hundred novels. Vacation reading was also a preferred activity of the young Marcel Proust. In *Sur la lecture* (Proust, 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 Iser, 1974; Fish, 1980) 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 book clubs studied). 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*.

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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, emphasis; with the extent of underlining within individual words locating the emphasis; ° °, quieter speech; (n), a pause, with n indicating the time in seconds; (.), a 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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