

CO-ELABORATION OF MEANING IN PEER-LED LITERATURE CIRCLES IN SECONDARY SCHOOL

The interplay between reading modes, quality of talk
and collaboration modes

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ABSTRACT. This study investigated the interplay between reading and social variables in peer-led literature circles at seventh grade school level, wherein students read a novel by themselves and discuss it without any teacher assistance. Specifically, this in-depth study of one classroom activity sought to answer the five following questions: 1) In what proportions do students use and vary the different reading modes in this type of peer-led literature circle? 2) To what extent do they elaborate their talk? 3) To what relative degree do they use different modes of collaboration and types of interaction? 4) Are there any linkages among these several variables? 5) Are there differences between the two regular and two “fast track” groups? The 20 participants (4 peer-led groups) belonged to a multiethnic school in a middle-class, urban environment in Canada. Quantitative and qualitative content analysis methods have been used to analyze transcripts of the discussions. Results show that in this type of peer-led group: 1) The *literal* reading mode is dominant; 2) by contrast, when students adopt an *aesthetic* or a *textual* mode of reading, the quality of their talk tends to be superior; 3) modes of collaboration centred on *feedback* and *management* greatly support this type of shared interpretation; 4) a microanalysis of excellent episodes would seem to demonstrate that fast-track groups adopt a more divergent means of co-elaborating meaning. Future research should better examine the many intellectual tools that are required to support peer scaffolding in this specific mode of peer-led discussion.

KEYWORDS: peer-led literature circles, transactional strategy instruction model, reading modes, collaboration modes, quality of talk

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Chinese

[Translation Shek Kam Tse]

標題: 中學的同儕文學圈共同闡釋意義: 閱讀模式、討論的質素及共同研究的模式

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摘要:

本研究調查了於中學第七級推行同儕文學圈計劃的閱讀和社會變項的相互影響。計劃中，學生在沒有教師的協助下，自行閱讀小說，並進行討論。這個研究深入地調查了一班課堂活動，為以下五個題目提供答案: (1) 在同輩文學圈的中，

學生運用了多少種不同的閱讀模式？這些模式有什麼變化？(2)

他們能把討論發揮至什麼程度？(3) 他們用了多少種共同研究的模式，以及不同類型的互動？(4)

這些變項之間有沒有連繫？(5) 兩組普通組和兩組「快速」組有什麼不同？

二十位參與計劃的學生分為四組，

他們就讀於加拿大市區一所中產階層的多種族學校。研究員採用了量化及質性的內容分析法，對學生的討論謄寫稿進行分析。研究結果顯示，這種同儕學習小組有以下特點: (1)

文學性的閱讀模式處於主導; (2)

相反，當學生採用美學的閱讀模式，或是按原文的閱讀模式是時，他們的討論質素較具優勢；(3)

學生進行共同研究時，集中在回饋及管理模式，能大大地支持往後的分享闡釋活動；(4)

研究員對一個優秀的課段進行了仔細分析，課段內容是「快速」組如何利用了一個發散性的方法，進行共同闡釋意義。往後的研究，應該對支援這同儕種特定模式的同儕建構討論的知識工具，進行更深入的調查。

關鍵詞：同儕文學圈、相互策略指導模式、閱讀模式、共同研究模式、討論的質素

Dutch

[Translation Tanja Janssen]

TITEL. Samen elaboreren van betekenis in door leerlingen geleide literaturoverlegingen in het voortgezet onderwijs. De wisselwerking tussen leesmanieren, gesprekskwaliteit en vormen van samenwerking

SAMENVATTING. Dit onderzoek richtte zich op de wisselwerking tussen lezen en sociale variabelen in leerlinggeleide literaturoverlegingen (grade 7), waarin leerlingen zelf een roman lezen en bespreken zonder hulp van de docent. Meer in het bijzonder had dit onderzoek naar één klasse-activiteit ten doel een antwoord te vinden op de volgende vijf vragen: 1. In hoeverre gebruiken leerlingen verschillende leesmanieren in dit type door leerlingen geleide literaturoverlegingen? 2. In hoeverre werken zij hun gesprek uit? 3. In welke mate gebruiken zij verschillen vormen van samenwerking en interactie? 4. Zijn er verbanden tussen deze variabelen? 5. Zijn er verschillen tussen de twee gewone en de twee snelle groepen? De 20 deelnemers (4 leerlinggeleide groepen) behoorden tot een multiculturele school in een 'middle-class', stedelijk omgeving in Canada. Er werd gebruik gemaakt van kwantitatieve en kwalitatieve analysemethoden voor het analyseren van transcripten van de discussies. De resultaten laten zien dat in dit type leerlinggeleide groep: 1. de letterlijke manier van lezen domineert; 2. de kwaliteit van het gesprek beter is wanneer leerlingen een esthetische of tekstgerichte manier van lezen aannemen; 3. samenwerking gericht op feedback en management zeer ondersteunend werkt voor dit type gedeelde interpretatie; 4. een microanalyse van goede episodes lijkt aan te geven dat snelle groepen een meer divergente manier gebruiken bij het gezamenlijk elaboreren van betekenissen. In toekomstig onderzoek zou nog beter gekeken

moeten worden naar de vele intellectuele middelen die nodig zijn om 'peer scaffolding' te ondersteunen in dit specifieke type literatuurdiscussies.

TREFOORDEN: leerlinggeleide literatuurdiscussies, 'transactional strategy instruction model', leesmanieren, kwaliteit van gesprekken

French

[Translation Laurence Pasa]

TITRE. Co-élaboration du sens dans les cercles littéraires entre pairs au secondaire

Les relations entre les modes de lecture, la qualité des échanges et les modalités de collaboration

RÉSUMÉ. Cette étude vise à décrire les modes de lecture et les modes de collaboration employés par des élèves de première secondaire lorsqu'ils discutent d'un roman dans des cercles littéraires entre pairs, sans la présence de l'enseignant. Plus précisément, cette recherche portant sur l'observation très fine d'une activité d'enseignement-apprentissage tente de répondre aux cinq questions suivantes : 1) dans quelles proportions les élèves utilisent-ils les différents modes et stratégies de lecture dans ce type de cercle littéraire entre pairs ? ; 2) jusqu'à quel point élaborent-ils leur propos ? ; 3) dans quelles proportions utilisent-ils les différents modes de collaboration et types d'interaction ? ; 4) y a-t-il des liens entre ces variables ? ; 5) y a-t-il des différences entre les deux groupes d'élèves réguliers et les deux groupes d'élèves plus forts ? Les vingt élèves (4 groupes de pairs) qui ont constitué l'échantillon provenaient d'une école canadienne de classe moyenne, située en milieu urbain, et à caractère multiethnique. Des méthodes qualitative et quantitative ont été utilisées pour analyser les transcriptions de discussions. Les résultats démontrent que dans ce type de cercle littéraire entre pairs: 1) le mode de lecture littéral est le plus employé; 2) cependant, les élèves élaborent davantage leur pensée quand ils utilisent les modes de lecture esthétique et textuel; 3) les modes de collaboration visant à gérer la tâche et à fournir de la rétroaction aux pairs semblent grandement soutenir ce travail de co-interprétation ; 4) une micro-analyse des épisodes jugés excellents révèle que les groupes d'élèves plus forts semblent adopter une modalité de co-élaboration du sens plutôt divergente, contrairement aux groupes réguliers. De futures recherches devraient examiner tous les outils intellectuels requis pour soutenir l'étayage entre pairs dans ce type de discussion entre pairs.

MOTS-CLÉS : cercles littéraires entre pairs, modèle d'enseignement transactionnel, modes de lecture, types d'interaction, degré d'élaboration du propos

Greek

[Translation by Panatoya Papoulia Tzelepi]

Τίτλος. Συνεργατική επεξεργασία νοήματος σε λογοτεχνικούς κύκλους δευτεροβάθμιας σχολείου που καθοδηγούνται από μαθητές: Η αλληλεπίδραση μεταξύ τρόπων ανάγνωσης, ποιότητας προφορικού λόγου και τρόπων συνεργασίας

Περίληψη. Αυτή η μελέτη διερεύνησε την αλληλεπίδραση μεταξύ ανάγνωσης και κοινωνικών παραμέτρων σε λογοτεχνικούς κύκλους μαθητών της 7ης τάξης που καθοδηγούνται από τους ίδιους τους μαθητές, όπου αυτοί διαβάζουν μόνοι τους ένα μυθιστόρημα και το συζητούν χωρίς τη βοήθεια δασκάλου. Ειδικότερα αυτή η εις βάθος μελέτη της δραστηριότητας της τάξης επεδίωξε να απαντήσει στις παρακάτω πέντε ερωτήσεις: 1) Σε ποια αναλογία οι μαθητές χρησιμοποιούν διαφορετικούς τρόπους ανάγνωσης σε αυτούς τους κύκλους; 2) Σε ποια έκταση επεξεργάζονται τον προφορικό λόγο τους; 3) Σε ποιο βαθμό χρησιμοποιούν διαφορετικές μορφές συνεργασίας και τύπους αλληλεπίδρασης; 4) Υπάρχουν κάποιες συνδέσεις μεταξύ αυτών των μεταβλητών; 5) Υπάρχουν διαφορές μεταξύ των δύο κανονικών ομάδων και των δύο «γρήγορων» ομάδων; Οι 20 συμμετέχοντες (4 αυτοκαθοδηγούμενες ομάδες) ανήκαν σε πολυεθνές σχολείο σε αστική μεσαία τάξη περιοχής του Καναδά. Μέθοδοι ποσοτικές και ποιοτικές χρησιμοποιήθηκαν για να αναλύσουν τις απομαγνητοφωνημένες συζητήσεις. Τα αποτελέσματα δείχνουν ότι σ' αυτό τον τύπο των αυτοκατευθυνόμενων ομάδων: 1) ο τρόπος της κατά λέξη/κυριολεκτικής ανάγνωσης είναι ο επικρατέστερος. 2) Αντίθετα όταν οι μαθητές υιοθετούν ένα αισθητικό ή κειμενικό τρόπο ανάγνωσης η ποιότητα της συζήτησης τείνει να είναι ανώτερη. 3) Τρόποι συνεργασίες επικεντρωμένοι στην ανατροφοδότηση και τη διαχείριση υποστηρίζουν πολύ αυτό τον τύπο της κοινής επεξεργασίας. 4) Μία μικροανάλυση των άριστων επεισοδίων τείνει να δείχνει ότι οι «γρήγορες» ομάδες υιοθετούν περισσότερο αποκλίνοντες τρόπους συνεργατικής επεξεργασίας νοήματος. Μελλοντική έρευνα πρέπει να

μελετήσει καλύτερα τα πολλά διανοητικά εργαλεία που απαιτούνται για να υποστηρίξουν αυτού του τρόπου της μαθητοκατευθυνόμενης συζήτησης.

Λέξεις κλειδιά: Λογοτεχνικοί αυτοκατευθυνόμενοι μαθητικοί κύκλοι, στρατηγικές αλληλεπιδραστικής διδασκαλίας, τρόποι ανάγνωσης, τρόποι συνεργασίας, ποιότητα προφορικού λόγου

Italian

[Translation Manuela Delfino, Francesco Caviglia]

TITOLO. Elaborazione cooperativa di significato in circoli di lettura di testi letterari condotti da pari nella scuola secondaria. L'interazione tra modi di lettura, qualità del colloquio e modi di collaborazione

SINTESI. Questo studio indaga l'interazione tra la lettura e le variabili sociali in circoli di lettura di testi letterari, a livello di settimo anno di istruzione, condotti da pari, nei quali gli studenti leggono autonomamente un romanzo e lo discutono senza alcun intervento dell'insegnante. In particolare, questo studio dettaglia dell'attività di una classe si propone di rispondere alle seguenti cinque domande: 1) Qual è la proporzione di studenti che usano e variano i modi di lettura in questo tipo di circoli di lettura tra pari? 2) In quale misura elaborano il loro discorso orale? 3) In che grado usano diversi modi di collaborazione e tipi d'interazione? 4) Ci sono collegamenti tra queste variabili? 5) Ci sono differenze tra i due gruppi standard e due gruppi "avanzati"? I 20 partecipanti (divisi in 4 gruppi condotti da pari) appartenevano a una scuola multi-etnica in ambiente urbano di classe media, in Canada. Per analizzare le trascrizioni delle discussioni sono stati usati metodi quantitativi e qualitativi di analisi di contenuti. I risultati mostrano che in questi tipi di gruppo condotti da pari 1) domina il modo di lettura letterale; 2) per contro, quando gli studenti adottano il modo di lettura estetico o testuale, la qualità del loro discorso orale tende ad essere superiore; 3) i modi di collaborazione centrati sul feedback e sulla gestione del gruppo offrono un forte supporto a questo tipo di interpretazione condivisa; 4) una micro-analisi di episodi di eccellenza sembra dimostrare che i gruppi avanzati adottino rispetto all'elaborazione cooperativa di significato approcci più divergenti. Future indagini dovrebbero esaminare meglio i numerosi strumenti intellettuali che sono necessari per promuovere azioni di sostegno tra pari in questa specifica modalità di discussione condotta da pari.

PAROLE CHIAVE: circoli di lettura di testi letterari condotti da pari, modelli di istruzione basati su strategie transazionali, modi di lettura, qualità del discorso orale

Polish

[Translation Elżbieta Awramiuk]

TITUŁ. Wspólne omawianie znaczenia w literackich kołach prowadzonych przez rówieśników w szkole średniej. Wzajemna zależność między sposobami czytania, jakością rozmowy i stylami współpracy

STRESZCZENIE. Naszym celem było zbadanie wzajemnych zależności między czytaniem i pewnymi społecznymi zmiennymi w prowadzonych przez rówieśników literackich kołach w siódmej klasie szkoły, kiedy uczniowie czytają samodzielnie powieść i dyskutują o niej bez pomocy nauczyciela. Dogłębne badanie jednej klasowej aktywności miało udzielić odpowiedzi na pięć następujących pytań: 1) W jakich proporcjach uczniowie stosują i zmieniają różne sposoby czytania w takim typie rówieśniczych literackich kół? 2) W jakim zakresie omawiają własną rozmowę? 3) W jakim stopniu wykorzystują różne metody współpracy i typy interakcji? 4) Czy istnieją powiązania między tymi kilkoma zmiennymi? 5) Czy istnieją różnice międzystalnymi i tymczasowymi grupami? 20 uczestników tworzących 4 grupy pochodziło z wieloetnicznej szkoły w zdominowanym przez średnią klasę, miejskim środowisku w Kanadzie. Dyskusja była oceniana pod względem jakościowym i ilościowym. Rezultaty dowodzą, że w tym typie rówieśniczej grupy: 1) dominuje literalny sposób czytania; 2) kiedy uczniowie wykorzystują estetyczny i tekstowy sposób czytania, jakość ich rozmów staje się wyższa; 3) style współpracy skoncentrowane na informacji zwrotnej i zarządzaniu wspierają wspólną interpretację; 4) mikroanaliza najlepszych epizodów wydaje się dowodzić, że tymczasowe grupy posługują się bardziej zróżnicowanymi sposobami wspólnego omawiania znaczenia. Przyszłe badania powinny pozwolić lepiej przyjrzeć się wielu intelektualnym narzędziom, które są potrzebne do wspierania interpretacji w tej specyficznej metodzie dyskusji prowadzonej przez rówieśnika.

SLOWA-KLUCZE: prowadzone przez rówieśnika literackie koła, strategie komunikacyjne, sposoby czytania, style współpracy, jakość rozmowy

Portuguese

[Translation Paulo Feytor Pinto]

TÍTULO. Co-elaboração de significado em comunidades de leitores lideradas por pares, no ensino secundário. A inter-relação entre modos de leitura, qualidade da discussão e modos colaborativos. (Hébert)

RESUMO. Este estudo investigou a inter-relação entre leitura e variáveis sociais em comunidades de leitores lideradas por pares, no 7º ano de escolaridade, em que os alunos lêem um romance sozinhos e discutem-no sem a ajuda do professor. Especificamente, este estudo aprofundado da actividade numa turma procurou responder às seguintes cinco questões: 1) Em que medida os alunos usam e variam os diferentes modos de leitura neste tipo de comunidades de leitores lideradas por pares? 2) Até onde conseguem elaborar a sua conversa? 3) Até que ponto recorrem a diferentes modos de colaboração e tipos de interacção? 4) Há algumas relações entre estas diferentes variáveis? 5) Há diferenças entre os dois grupos normais e os dois grupos melhores? Os 20 participantes (4 grupos liderados por pares) pertenciam a uma escola multi-étnica, num contexto urbano, de classe média, no Canadá. Métodos quantitativos e qualitativos de análise de conteúdo foram utilizados na análise das transcrições das conversas. Os resultados mostram que neste tipo de grupos liderados por pares: 1) Predomina o modo de leitura *literal*; 2) Quando os alunos adoptam um modo de leitura *estético* ou *textual*, a qualidade da discussão tende a ser superior; 3) Modos de colaboração centrados no *feedback* e no *processo/gestão* promovem fortemente este tipo de interpretação partilhada; 4) A micro-análise de episódios excelentes parece demonstrar que os alunos melhores adoptam uma maneira mais divergente de co-elaboração de significado. Investigação futura deverá examinar melhor as várias ferramentas intelectuais exigidas neste tipo de discussão liderada por pares.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: comunidades de leitores lideradas por pares, modelo de instrução de estratégia transaccional, modos de leitura, modos colaborativos, qualidade da conversação

Spanish

[Translation Ingrid Marquez]

TÍTULO. Elaboración conjunta de significados en círculos de lectura dirigidos por estudiantes de la escuela secundaria

La relación entre modos de lectura, calidad de intercambio oral y maneras de colaborar

RESUMEN. Este estudio investigó la relación entre la lectura y algunos factores sociales en círculos de lectura dirigidos por estudiantes del primer año de secundaria, en los cuales los participantes leen una novela por su cuenta y la discuten sin ninguna ayuda de parte del docente. Especificamente, el esmerado estudio de una sola actividad en el salón pretende contestar las siguientes cinco preguntas: 1) En un círculo de lectura dirigido por los estudiantes, ¿hasta qué punto usan y modifican los diferentes modos de leer? 2) ¿Hasta qué punto pueden elaborar el nivel de su plática? 3) ¿Hasta qué grado relativo ocupan diferentes modos de colaboración y tipos de interacción? 4) ¿De qué manera se relacionan estas variables? 5) ¿Existen diferencias entre los grupos promedios y “avanzados”? Los veinte participantes formaron cuatro grupos, todos dirigidos por los mismos estudiantes; venían de una escuela multi-racial de clase media ubicada en una región urbana de Canadá. Métodos de análisis de contenidos tanto cuantitativos como cualitativos se usaron para considerar las transcripciones de sus pláticas. Los resultados demuestran que en este tipo de grupo dirigido por los estudiantes, 1) Una interpretación *literal* de la lectura es la que domina. 2) En contraste, cuando los estudiantes adoptan un modo de lectura *estético* o *textual*, la calidad de su plática suele mejorar. 3) La interpretación compartida es fuertemente apoyada por los modos de colaboración centrados en la *retroalimentación* y *manejo*; 4) un microanálisis de algunos episodios excelentes sugiere que los grupos avanzados adoptan modos más amplios de co-elaborar un significado. Estudios posteriores deben examinar con más detalle las múltiples herramientas intelectuales que se requieren para fortalecer el apoyo entre estudiantes en una plática dirigida por los mismos.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Círculos de lectura dirigidos por los estudiantes, modelo de instrucción por una estrategia de transacción, modos de lectura, modos de colaboración, calidad de intercambio oral.

1. INTRODUCTION

In comparison to traditional and unidirectional question-answer modes of teaching and evaluation, collaborative activities such as literature circles would appear to better reflect and sustain the dialogic nature of literary interpretation (Almasi, 1993, 1995). As suggested by 8-year-old Sarah's assertion that "we don't know what we think about a book until we've talked about it" (Chambers, 1996:7), a substantive body of research over the past fifteen years has reported the social, cognitive and affective benefits of peer-led discussion in better understanding and appreciating literature in class.

Yet, despite the fact that numerous studies have focused on peer-led literary discussions (and those mainly at the elementary and intermediate levels), very few of them provide a clear picture as to how those many variables combine in an authentic secondary classroom context – and almost none consider either the quality of content or the ways which might have been employed in class to teach, assess and evaluate it (Maloch, 2002; Almasi, O'Flahavan & Arya, 2001; McMahon & Raphael, 1997; Goatley, Brock & Raphael, 1995; Almasi, 1993; McMahon, 1992; Gilles, 1991; Eeds & Wells, 1989).

Furthermore, while many forms of literary discussion exist, with varying degrees of teacher control (Chinn, Anderson & Waggoner, 2001), we are aware of very few studies focusing on what small groups of students can achieve by discussing on their own, without the presence or supervision of a teacher. We still know too little about how students develop their thinking, reading and social skills in such a collaborative setting; how this new and complex form of social learning discourse coheres and how proficient peer discussions differ from less proficient discussions in that regard (Kumpulainen & Kaartinen, 2003; Almasi et al., 2001). This may in part explain why book clubs or literature circles have taken hold to some degree, but are not yet a widespread occurrence in secondary classrooms (Commeyras & Degroff, 1998; Lebrun, 2004).

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

We have based our study on a theoretical framework divided into four sections, in an effort to better understand the interrelation between the characteristics of 1) the object to be taught (reading literature), 2) the student (adolescent reader), 3) the teaching method (Transactional Strategies Instruction), and 4) the task modality (peer-led discussion).

2.1 *Reading literature in class*

From a cognitivist and socio-cultural perspective, reading comprehension is extracting and constructing meaning from text. It entails three elements: the reader, the text

and the activity. These elements are highly interactive and situated within a broad sociocultural context that affects them and the nature of their interactions (Sweet & Snow, 2002). Many works on comprehension underline the active involvement of the reader in creating meaning from a text (Pressley 2000; Pressley & Afflerback, 1995). For example, Irwin categorizes five main types of interacting reading processes, from bottom-up microprocesses – such as decoding – to integration, macroprocesses, elaboration and metacognition (Irwin, 1986). Langer characterizes literary reading as “envisionment building” and proposes that readers approach reading by “being out and stepping into” a text, then “being in and moving through.” This activity is sometimes interrupted by “stepping out and rethinking” what one already knows. Finally, readers have the opportunity to “step out and objectify” the experience of reading (Langer, 1990ab).

2.1.1 *Efferent and aesthetic reading stances*

Shaped by private and social contexts, one’s interpretations are never stagnant and result from the simultaneous interaction of many reading stances. Rosenblatt (1991) distinguishes two basic approaches to a text, to be situated on a continuum: an aesthetic one, defined as primarily “private”, and an efferent one, defined as “public.” In adopting this latter reading stance, readers are concerned with gathering information to use in some manner in the real world – with knowledge, facts, and eventually the products of reading. Literary theorists view literature reading essentially as an act of rereading, analysis and discourse production – a discourse which asks the reader to elaborate and rigorously support her thoughts (Cornis-Pope, 2000; Daunay, 1999). Such a view leads students to adopt a predominantly efferent stance in literature classes.

At the other extremity of the continuum, an aesthetic stance accords “more attention to the penumbra of private feelings, attitudes, sensations and ideas.” (Rosenblatt, 1994: 184). As such, reading literature is considered as a virtual and living-through experience, a transactional process, a unique and momentary event occurring between a reader, a text and a context. Rosenblatt, in considering these different reading stances, argues that “we do not have the cognitive, the referential, the factual, the analytic, the abstract on the one side and the affective, the emotive, the sensuous, on the other. Instead, both aspects of meaning – which might be termed the public and the private – are always present in our transactions (...)” (idem). According to Rosenblatt, the aesthetic stance, as opposed to the efferent or more functional one, is the most effective way to read fiction and poetry and “[t]he notion that children must ‘understand’ the text cognitively, efferently, before it can be responded to aesthetically is a rationalization that must be rejected.” (Rosenblatt, 1982: 273).

There is typically, however, a reluctance on the part of secondary teachers to consider this ‘private’ or aesthetic side of interpretation; too often, it is treated as an optional portion of the lesson to be quickly and informally discussed at the end of class. Indeed, we know that young readers participating in literature circles appear to feel more comfortable expressing personal and tentative thoughts (McMahon, 1992; Goatley et al. 1995; Alvermann et al., 1996). Yet we know of very few studies de-

scribing the extent to which middle-school or secondary students adopt these different reading stances when discussing a book in peer-led literature circles, and the point at which they elaborate their discourse while employing those stances.

2.2 *Characteristics of adolescent readers*

A majority of teenagers entering seventh grade cannot be considered to be autonomous readers, given that 40% of 13-year-olds appear to have difficulties interrelating ideas and making generalizations, while as many as 60% of 17-year-olds are unable to understand complicated literary passages (Curtis, 2002; PISA, 2001; Langer, 1990ab). We know that competent adolescent readers use a wider variety of comprehension strategies with greater frequency, offer more interpretative responses and do less retelling than their less competent peers (Olshavsky, 1976; Purves & Rippere, 1968; Squire, 1964). Even if they are able to adopt a variety of stances when they read literature, such as those identified by Thomson, including “unreflective interest in action, empathizing, analogizing, reflecting, reviewing, considering relationships between the author/textual ideology/own processes and identity”, teenagers nonetheless lack the intellectual and moral maturity to distance themselves from the text, or from themselves, and appear mainly to adopt the first three of those stances (Thomson, 1987; Applebee, 1978).

In conclusion, a majority of first-year secondary school readers still require explicit teaching of comprehension and critical reading strategies (Curtis, 2002; Soussi, 1995). It must be emphasised, however, that research into reading comprehension typically concentrates on children involved in primary education, or on learning-disabled readers, and that such a focus is in itself problematic if we wish to learn more about teaching methods in regular classes (Curtis, 2002; Bimmel, 2001). Very few studies have compared how competent and less competent readers might differ in terms of the reading modes they employ or the quality of their discourse in peer-led literature circles.

2.3 *Transactional Strategies Instruction for teaching literature*

Social, cognitive and metacognitive aspects of classroom conversation are closely intertwined and largely dependent on instructional practices enacted by the teacher. It is clear that these aspects influence how students read, respond and collaborate in peer-led grouping (Many & Wiseman, 1992) and that “degrees of collaboration” depend substantially on the assignment students are to complete through peer discussions (Alvermann et al., 1996: 259). Pressley’s successful Transactional Strategies Instructional model of teaching postulates that if reading comprehension is the result of multiple interactions between teacher/text/reader and other readers, then decentralized and integrative activities (oral, writing, reading) would better serve to explore the plural and socio-cultural nature of reading literature (Brown et al., 1995ab; Pressley, Brown et al., 1995).

Transactional Strategies Instruction (TSI) combines a number of strategies and instructional techniques identified by the National Reading Panel (2000) as having

solid scientific bases for improving comprehension. A first is explicit teaching, which consists in the teacher's modeling and explaining a small repertoire of comprehension strategies (e.g., prediction based on prior knowledge, self-questioning, construction of mental images, summarization). A second is peer teaching, wherein students in small groups practice and discuss their repertoire of comprehension strategies. The hypothesis is that eventually students internalize various strategies and actively use them when reading independently. In particular, this model reflects the importance of the social aspect of meaning construction and the concept of "distributed authority." The teacher is also a learner in this model. Despite this, little is known about what results from the use of such strategies within literature circles in a transactional teaching context, in an actual secondary school classroom setting.

2.4 Small learning group dynamics

Reading and critical comprehension strategies are high-level thinking skills. Vygotsky (1985) has theorized that children require the scaffolding (questions, explanations and modeling) of adults or of their more knowledgeable peers in order to progressively internalize and imitate those experts' cultural behaviours. Literature circles or peer-led exploratory discussions of literature would seem to offer a social learning context that helps children to construct their comprehension (Fall, Webb and Chudowsky, 2000; Almasi, 1993; Sweigart, 1991). Predominant research shows that, in peer-led literature circles, students can use a wide variety of responses (Gilles, 1991; Goatley et al. 1995) and that "talk helps to confirm, extend, or modify individual interpretation and creates a better understanding of the text" (Eeds & Wells, 1989: 27). It also leads students to justify their thoughts more, as compared to teacher-led discussions (Leal, 1992; Almasi, 1995). Despite those points of interest, many teachers, mainly at the secondary level, doubt the effectiveness of such a student-centred activity (Alvermann, 2000; Commeyras et al., 1998). And "While the important job of engaging students in discussions seems easy, it is an effort that is actually very difficult and remains a neglected part of preservice and inservice training" (McCann, 2003:10).

2.4.1 Some challenges within literature circles

For instance, challenges within literature circles may depend on numerous factors, such as students' academic abilities (Fowler, 1996; Dillenbourg et al., 1996; Leal, 1992; Gilles, 1991); social, gender and power relations within the group (Maloch, 1999; Evans, 1999; Rice, 1999); the type of book in play (Sipe, 2000; Leal, 1992; Galda, 1990); and the role and methods of the teacher (Galda and Liang, 2003; Pressley, 2000; Smagorinsky & Fly, 1993, 1994). In fact, we still understand very little of what makes some peer discussions more effective than others, and whether their efficiency might be associated with different kinds of interactional behaviours (Kumpulainen & Kaartinen, 2003; Almasi, O'Flahavan & Arya, 2001; Keefer, Zeitz & Resnick; Brice, 1999).

2.4.2 *Which degree of autonomy?*

Nystrand and his colleagues found that the efficiency of peer-led work would appear to depend on the degree of autonomy that teachers grant to students (Nystrand, Gamoran & Heck, 1993). In previous research, they had been surprised to observe that literature classes spending more time in small groups achieved poorer results than a class featuring no group time at all (Nystrand & Gamoran, 1991). Beyond merely inquiring how much time was spent in small groups, the researchers decided to consider two additional measures in order to analyse the quality of group time: student autonomy and student production of knowledge. They noticed that highly autonomous small groups fostered greater achievement in comparison to classes with no group work at all or with rigidly teacher-structured group work (work-sheets, etc.): “Analysis of student autonomy showed that the higher the degree of autonomy, the more likely group time was to contribute positively to achievement.” (Nystrand et al., 1993: 20).

Clearly, a delicate balance needs to be established between structure and freedom, such that peer interaction remains sufficiently structured to promote rich thinking, but at the same time leaves students free to pursue their own processes for thinking (King, Staffieri & Adalgais, 1998:135). That balance becomes even more important at secondary school level, given that high school students are more likely to acquire literature discussion strategies when they are given responsibility for directing or leading discussions (Vinz et al., 2000). We therefore need to better understand how peer collaborate during good episodes of discussion within entirely student-structured peer-led literature circles, wherein students work to formulate and solve reading-related “problems” of their own.

2.4.3 *Which kind of working modalities and problem solving processes?*

Webb (1992), in studying interactions in mathematics learning groups, states that students who limit their participation to providing answers to other members learn less than those who verbalize their problem-solving processes. According to Swiss psychologists Gilly, Fraise, Roux et al. (1988), who conducted pioneering research on problem-solving approaches in mathematics, in order for there to be true knowledge-building between peers, not only must student opposition be engaged through argumentation, but that very conflict must also involve the problem-solving procedure itself (1988: 26). They go on to distinguish four collaborative working modalities within a mathematics problem-solving team of two children: 1) *approving co-elaboration* – when one child elaborates and the other agrees; 2) *co-construction* – when both agree and work equally; 3) *confrontation* – when both disagree without offering any explanations and, finally, 4) *confrontation with argumentation* – when both disagree but provide each other with arguments to defend their point.

In counterpoint, it must be said that most empirical studies of small learning groups have involved students working to solve logical-scientific problems with known solutions. But what about “narrative” or moral-type problems with multiple solutions, such as those which generally occur in literature discussions? One of the basic postulates of Bruner’s cultural psychology is that we organize and manage our

knowledge of the world essentially in two ways: through scientific thinking, and through narrative thinking (1996: 58). Story comprehension would require readers to use a narrative kind of thinking, specifically oriented around human agents, their intentions, their feelings and their social interactions. Cognitivist researchers in reading comprehension would prefer to talk about the need to make social inferences while reading fiction (Spiro & Taylor, 1987). Specifically, Keefer et al. (2000) posit that literature circles principally require a divergent and dialectic type of thinking based on informal logic.

To conclude this conceptual review, we need to better understand not only the content of peer-led literature circles (the way in which different profiles of students use different reading modes and to what degree they elaborate their talk), but also whether there are any specific forms or modalities of co-elaboration of meaning that could be distinguished in a discussion setting involving narrative or moral-type problems. It is still unclear which collaborative modes and scaffolding patterns young adolescents use in such entirely autonomous collaborative settings, in the absence of teacher prompts or assistance during discussion.

3. RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND METHOD

Thus, the overall purpose of this investigation has been to explore and describe the relations between type of reading, quality of talk and type of social interactions in literature circles at the secondary level (Hébert, 2003). If secondary teachers are potentially reluctant to let students interpret on their own, it follows that we must investigate more deeply how children attain and develop higher levels of cognitive and social functioning within peer discussions. As Almasi et al. (2001) state, “such understanding is necessary for more responsive teaching.”

3.1 *Research questions*

Social, cognitive and metacognitive aspects of class conversation are tightly intertwined. Therefore, in order to better understand what occurs in entirely autonomous peer-led discussion, we would first need to identify, on a cognitive level: what kind of subjects and reading stances students adopt, absent any direct teacher prompt or specific assignment; and how richly they examine a single topic. On a metacognitive level, we must investigate how students manage tasks through their interactions, how they adopt (or not) those roles traditionally handled by teachers (such as helping to develop a topic, recognizing failures in comprehension, etc). On the interactional and social level, we must also observe how they offer feedback in this context. In order to gain a more global picture, it would be valuable to identify any existing correlations between all those variables. For example, do students collaborate and elaborate meaning the same way when they are adopting a literal stance as compared to an aesthetic or an analytic one? Finally, it would also be of interest for teachers to know whether more and less proficient groups of readers differ on these points, and how.

Consequently, we have been guided by five research questions in seeking to better understand how young teenagers sustain co-elaboration of meaning in a collaborative setting without any direct teacher assistance: 1) Which different reading modes do seventh-grade students employ in such a learning context and in what proportions? 2) What is the quality or degree of elaboration of their discussion? 3) In what proportions do they use the various modes of collaboration and types of interactions? 4) Do any correlations exist among all these variables? 5) Are there any differences between regular and “fast-track” groups?

3.2 Type of research and limitations

Rosenblatt’s transactional theory of reading shares the same philosophic underpinnings or basic postulates as qualitative research. First, reality (“reading comprehension” in our case) is not singular – rather, there are multiple socio-psychological constructions forming an interconnected whole that is unique and can only be understood as such (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994). Accordingly, rather than attempting to isolate factors that could partly explain how students construct meaning in peer-led literature circles – seen here as a shared-cognition learning situation – we have endeavoured as teacher-researcher to observe and describe the interrelations among many cognitive and social variables (type and quality of content, type of social interactions, differences between students, correlation between variables). The present research therefore consists of an in-depth study into a single classroom activity, with descriptive and comparative finalities; as such, it does not allow for drawing generalizations.

Primary and complementary data were collected through various techniques (in situ observations, audio-taped discussions, students’ written logs, tests and questionnaires, teacher-researcher field notes) throughout the academic year. We then proceeded to a microanalysis of discussion transcripts, employing a mixed-mode treatment: qualitative content analysis, followed by a quantitative multi-analysis of frequency, variance and correlation.

If comprehension is the result of a transaction occurring between reader-readers-text and teacher then, on a methodological plane, this might signify that the observer (here, the teacher-researcher) was embedded in the situation and was learning from and with her students. If so, she cannot pretend to be neutral and objective but rather must have a singular perspective, i.e., that of a teacher-researcher who spent ten months with her students. While such a viewpoint may provide a rich understanding of the data in context, it also presents some risks, such as, among others, a halo effect.

We have sought to overcome this by using multiple methodological processes. To dissociate the teacher-researcher from her data on an affective plane and to validate each coding step, we worked with other raters (2) and assistants (4). After the experiment, they helped the teacher-researcher to transcribe the audio-recorded discussions, to test instruments, to codify and analyze the content and to proceed to statistical analysis. Data sets have also been analyzed in many gradual steps in order to progressively condense and abstract them. Many re-readings have been conducted

at different times over a two-year period. Highly granular units of analysis have been employed, and the codification checked by a transversal validation process (Huberman & Miles, 1994: 90).

4. POPULATION, SAMPLES, PROCEDURES AND DATA COLLECTION

4.1 Population

The study was conducted by the teacher as researcher in a multiethnic, private Montreal-area French school. The teacher taught in this school for 15 years. Based on data collected by the school and the researcher, the majority of students belonged to middle-class families and 75% of the students did not speak French at home. The population of the study was composed of two seventh-grade¹ classes – a total of 57 students (11-13 years old). One was a fast-track class with good students, selected on the basis of their overall grades at the end of elementary school (80% or more); the other was a regular class with average and below-average students. An objective reading test conceived for mid-elementary allophone students (O.I.S.E., 1981) was administered to all students in September in order to measure their comprehension abilities with respect to short literary and expository texts. The fast-track class scored an average of 77%, whereas the regular group achieved a 66% average.

4.2 Procedures and samples

For the experimental phase in May-June, the teacher selected 11 groups of heterogeneous discussants (5-6 per group) from the two classes, according to seven criteria: results of the September reading test; GPA (grade point average) for each term; motivation to read; ability to write a journal log; ability to cooperate and generate ideas in small groups; ability to talk; and assiduity in schoolwork. For three weeks, once a week, each group met for a 30 to 45 minute audio-taped, peer-led literature circle. This was a free model of literature circle. Excepting the fact that one student had the responsibility to animate the discussion (essentially, to control turn-taking and lead the selection of topics), no specific roles were imposed. Prior to the meeting, each student was required to read one-third of a novel and write pre-discussion logs in his or her reading journal (rough subjects to be discussed as a group). After each discussion, the student was asked to evaluate various aspects of the discussion and develop these in the form of three logs in his or her journal (writing at least 60 words per log).

At the end of the experiment, four groups of discussants were chosen (two per class) as samples, the criteria being: technical quality of their audio-taped discussions, attendance of all members and completion of all written work before and after discussions. We are aware of the limitations implied by this format, and that we may have omitted interesting data but, given that our intention was to compare groups, the main criterion was to obtain a comparable amount and type of material. Fur-

¹ In the province of Quebec (Canada), there is no middle-school. Seventh grade is the first year of secondary school and students are usually 12–13 years old.

thermore, seeking to understand the internal dynamic of a classroom activity in all its complexity, according to a particular teaching approach and within a natural environment, necessarily implies restricting the scope of analysis. We have therefore limited our observation to eight literature circles.

4.3 *Classroom setting and Material*

Prior to the experiment, from October to March, students received the benefit of some transactional strategies instruction, in which reading and writing played a large role. Reading comprehension strategies and literary concepts were taught, with reference to excerpts from their textbook and abridged versions of Homer's classics (*The Odyssey* and *The Iliad*). Following these explicit and traditional teaching phases was an individual reading and practice phase, during which each student wrote personal comments in a dialogue journal while reading a novel self-selected from a class list (for a total of three novels read between September and February). The teacher responded to and evaluated each of the three journals, guiding students to use comprehension strategies and verbalize them according to a minimum set of rhetorical and coherence rules (see Appendix A for further explanation of this ecological design).

In March-April, a pre-experiment sought to familiarize students with peer-led literature circles in conjunction with journal logs (for this, all students had to read *Call of the Wild* by Jack London). This also helped the teacher in gathering information about students' comprehension and collaboration abilities in order to constitute heterogeneous groups for the experimentation phase occurring in May-June (for which they had to read *Friday* by Michel Tournier). In both the pre-experiment and the experimentation phases, the teacher selected the novel to read, as well as assembling the student groups.

4.4 *Data collection*

Primary data came from the transcripts of eight audio-taped discussions (the first two discussions from each of four discussants groups, for a total of eight transcriptions). To gain a holistic sense of the principal data and in order to triangulate, the teacher-researcher also collected complementary data (journal logs, reading tests, survey questionnaires on habits of reading and working in collaboration, co-evaluation of discussants and teachers' field notes). Questionnaires, tests and journal logs completed before experiment served to select groups. When the time came to code the quality of talk in the discussions, students' co-evaluations helped to ensure that their own opinions as to the efficiency of discussion were taken into consideration. Finally, journal logs written before and after each audio-taped discussion enabled a better understanding and analysis of the content of discussions, revealing what each participant had wished to share with peers and to elaborate following the discussion. Teachers' field notes helped in interpreting the data in general.

5. INSTRUMENTS OF ANALYSIS AND CODING

By differentiating or merging different categories of indicators arising from our theoretical framework, we were progressively able to create three coding instruments to answer our research questions, corresponding to three main variables: reading modes, quality of talk and collaboration modes. From there, we proceeded to a sociolinguistic content analysis of transcripts and used a statistical multi-analysis of frequency, variance and correlation to find possible relationships between variables and differences between students groups.

5.1 *First variable and analysis instrument: Reading Modes*

Our first variable for analyzing the content of discussions involved the different modes or stances that interrelate in the act of reading literature. As with many researchers, we retained four main modes of reading: literal, aesthetic, textual analysis and critical (Canvat, 1999; Dufays, 1997, 1996; Langer, 1990a; Leenhardt, 1980; Applebee, 1978). To distinguish each of these modes – which are indeed neither perfect categories, nor sequential or hierarchical – we chose to view them as a spiral, the span of the reader’s response to text becoming wider or deeper from literal mode to critical one.

Table 1. *Analysis instrument to determine Reading modes*

Modes of reading	Strategy’s span or object	Examples
Literal comprehension	Referential, factual aspects of the story as a mimesis	I wonder what a “pecari” is...
Aesthetic	Oneself, characters, fiction, mimesis	When Robinson forgets himself, soaking in the mud, it is so sad, because he acts like a pig
Textual analysis	A literary discourse, an art object of language constructed by an author	This scene is a nodal one in the novel, because after that...
Critical	A work of art and other works of art; one’s and others’ interpretation	There is no such a scene in Defoe’s novel, why did Michel Tournier add it?

In other words, when students adopt a *literal mode* of reading, they are neutral readers who seek to seize factual and referential aspects of the text, a text being considered as a neutral and one-dimensional object. When they adopt the *aesthetic mode*, they are emotive and sensitive readers, who engage themselves in the world of fiction. In the *analytic mode*, they are cerebral readers who want to understand the mechanisms of a discourse, of language as an art object constructed by an author, in a specific context of creation. Finally, in the *critical mode*, they are cultivated readers who criticize a work of art in all its dimensions, compare it with other works within other cultural contexts, yet also compare their own reading with those of others readers (see examples below in Table 1).

5.2 *Second variable and analysis instrument: Quality of talk or degree of elaboration*

Identifying the modes of reading that students used in their oral comments constituted a first step in analyzing the content of transcripts and distinguishing episodes. However, we also wished to better understand how they elaborated their thoughts in such a peer-led learning situation. For this second variable, we had to develop an instrument to evaluate the degree of elaboration or the quality of their talk. In evaluating many written journal responses and in listening to many discussions, we were led to note that these types of discursive contexts involved speech of an argumentative nature. We therefore established that, insofar as a successful comment, and according to the three basic movements of traditional argumentation, the subject must be brought, posed and then developed.

For example, if a student wishes to share his or her visualization of a scene, he must start with a brief recall of this scene (e.g., “You remember the scene of the storm, just before the wreck?”). Then he will have to more or less announce his intention, and thereby pose the subject, i.e., by naming the reading strategy he intends to use (“I visualized this scene really well...”). Lastly, he will have to describe and comment on his visualization, potentially by quoting from the text (“because the way the author spoke about the sky, which blackened all of a sudden like...”). We term these ‘elements of elaboration’. An episode of talk consisting of the three preceding units of meaning would have earned a mark or rating of “C” for its quality of elaboration, with especial consideration to the fact that these students are in Grade 7.

Table 2. *Analysis instrument to determine quality or Degree of elaboration of talk. Criteria to be considered for the quality: Cohesion, relevance, accuracy, variety and solidity*

Number of elements (= One subject announced +)	Degree of elaboration
6 elements of elaboration or more	A - A+ (excellent)
4-5 elements of elaboration	B - B+ (very good)
2-3 elements of elaboration	C - C+ (correct)
0-1 element of elaboration	D (insufficient)

Let us however specify that, with respect to the exploratory nature of such talk, we never insisted upon the order of those elements, nor imposed a rigid structure whereby students were to write or talk about their impressions. Still, even exploratory talk can be richly developed and we judged the quality of elaboration of each episode through observation: the cohesion of the whole (speaking about one thing at a time), the number of elements used to elaborate the subject; the relevance, accuracy and variety of those elements, and their solidity (see Table 2).

5.3 *Third variable and analysis instrument: Modes of collaboration*

From a socio-linguistic point of view, social interactions are closely embedded in the construction of meaning within literary discussions and cannot be ignored. To build our analysis instrument for a third variable, which we termed modes of collaboration, we observed various existing taxonomies for coding verbal interactions in small learning groups. We focused on those of Goatley et alii (1995) and Leal (1992), who reported experiments with small groups in elementary classes; Marshall, Smagorinsky and Smith (1995), who exposed a very detailed system of coding for literary discussions led by teachers in large and small groups of adolescents or adults; and Klingner and Vaughn (1999), whose results came from experimentation at the secondary level, without teacher assistance and within a strategic teaching context.

Thus, as we sought to analyze our data and obtain an acceptable level of inter-judge agreement – after having tested several different models of categorization – we arrived at four modes of collaboration: *Give feedback*, *Manage behaviours and tasks*, *Articulate subjects* and *Develop the subject*. For a unit of meaning to be coded as *Give Feedback*, it had to relate only to social aspects – such as approving, disapproving, simply listening neutrally to what someone else had to say, or asking for feedback – and therefore not contain anything that would develop the subject. The *Manage behaviours and tasks* mode included all the units that we considered as metacognitive or procedural, such as organizing talk turns, looking for discipline, managing the technical aspects of the task, identifying and trying to solve comprehension and elaboration problems (e.g., helping a peer to elaborate, or asking a peer for help).

5.4 *Coding verbal interactions*

Coding verbal interactions is a highly complex undertaking, and it must be said that the methodological cost of analyzing conversations in a natural and multiethnic context is high. Over the eight transcripts of discussions, a total of 116 episodes² and 3.809 units of meaning³ were identified and coded using the three instruments developed for each variable studied. Each discussion had first to be divided into episodes, which were then coded with the first instrument (see Table 1) to identify the main subject discussed and the dominant reading mode used. Second, every unit of

2 *Episode of discussion: a group of units of meaning that serves to verbalize one reading strategy and to develop one subject. For example, in relation to Tournier's novel, Friday, if students were to discuss how surprised they were by how Robinson acted when he decided to construct a fortress after Indians had visited his island, and were they also to ask themselves what the word "crenel" meant, then this would constitute two distinct episodes of discussion because: 1) two reading strategies were used (they "judged a character's behaviour" and "questioned the meaning of a single word") and 2) those strategies corresponded to different modes of reading, the first showing an aesthetic mode, the second a literal one.*

3 *For example, there are two units of meaning in this sentence: 1) "Yes, your idea is a good one // 2) because I believe that Robinson is a civilized man..." In the first unit the speaker offers feedback to one of his peers and, in the second, he develops the subject.*

meaning related to the development of the subject within an episode had to be considered to determine the degree of elaboration of talk (see Table 2). Third, all units of meaning related to social or metacognitive aspects were coded with the last instrument (Table 3 for coding, Table 4 for an example).

Two raters⁴ and the teacher-researcher coded roughly 9% of the audio-taped discussion transcripts, three times over (once for each variable). Should this appear at first glance as a small amount, the high methodological cost of such content analysis must be recalled here. First, coding verbal interactions in small groups “*requires highly inferential (and very difficult) coding judgments from observers.*” (Trujillo, 1986: 379). In addition, we were required to code each episode with three coding instruments, requiring a very fine-grained analysis. Thus, as it pertained to Reading modes and Degree of elaboration, inter-rater agreement reached 83%; for Collaboration modes, the same figure was 78%. This was a very positive result, considering how little agreement there has been as to which coding systems are most appropriate for small group research. Furthermore, where multidimensional systems of coding enhance the richness of observation, inter-coder reliability tends to decrease. Finally, after this qualitative content-analysis step, we looked for frequencies and correlation between variables, and differences between our two kinds of groups (fast-track vs. regular) using different types of statistical analysis⁵.

4 The raters were two excellent pre-service students in their third year of university, who had previously completed a Teaching Literature one semester course with the researcher, during which, they had started to get familiar with two of the three coding instruments (preliminary versions). The year after the experiment, the researcher worked with them over a period of two months. They first received three short training sessions of 10 hours for each instrument (Reading Modes, Elaboration of Content, and Collaboration Modes). Next, they coded data with the three instruments and counter-checked with the researcher 9% of the material (30 hours).

5 a) Descriptive analysis of frequency, means and proportions for all three variables; b) Differences between proportion tests (Z-Test, $> < -1.96$, $p = .05$) to compare the use of the categorical variable (reading strategies) between regular and fast-track groups; c) Analysis of Variance (Anova, F statistic and post hoc analysis, HSD Tukey Test) to compare continuous variables between groups (degree of elaboration) and d) Correlation Analysis (Pearson Product-Moment) to compare types of interactions between groups.

Table 3. Analysis instrument to determine Modes of collaboration and types of interaction used during discussions

Modes of collaboration	Purpose of collaboration	Types of interaction (indicators)
Give feedback	Social aspects	F (<i>Feedback</i>) -1 Approve F-2 Disapprove F-3 Doubt or listen remaining neutral F-4 Ask for a retroaction
Manage behaviours and task	Metacognitive aspects	M (<i>Management</i>)-1 Manage turns M-2 Discipline M-3 Help peers to elaborate M-4 Manage the task
Articulate subjects	Cognitive aspects	A (<i>Articulation</i>) -1 Initiate a new subject A-2 Come back to a previous subject A-3 Deviate from the subject A-4 Abandon of a subject
Develop the Subject Residues		DS- Develop the subject R (<i>Residues</i>)-1 Inaudible R-2 Incomplete R-3 Out of subject R-4 Talk about illustrations

Table 4. Example of coding Modes of collaboration

#	Student	Talk	Collaboration modes	Indicators
60	JU	I did a comment on why he (Robinson) stayed alive and the others are all dead	Articulate (A1)	Initiate a new subject
61	CH	...yeah, that's true !	Give feedback (F1)	Approve
62	JU	And the dog stayed	Develop the subject	To continue, to precise
63	CH	On what page? On what page did you see that...// What kind of comment is that, what strategy, which icon ⁶ ? I don't know...	Management (M4) Management (M3)	Management of the task Help a peer to elaborate, to clarify his thought
64	JU	Wait...	Management (M4)	She looks in her book
65	AU	Question-hypothesis?	Management (M3)	Id.
66	JU	Yes	Management (M3)	Id.
67	CH	And what's your hypothesis?	Management (M3)	Id.

⁶ Here, CH refers to JU's written comment (in her journal log). He is asking her to tell the group what reading strategy she tried to apply and is seeking here to share with her peers. Since each strategy was represented by an icon, he asks her to specify which icon she had chosen (see Appendix I).

6. RESULTS

We should recall here that we have been guided by five research questions: 1) In what proportions do seventh-grade students use the different reading modes while discussing in peer-led literature circles without any teacher assistance? 2) What is the quality or the degree of elaboration of their talk? 3) In which proportions do they use the different modes of collaboration and types of interactions? 4) Do any correlations exist among all these variables? And 5) finally, are there any differences between regular groups and “fast track” ones? This section will present results pertaining to the four first questions; those related to the last question will be embedded in each of the four first parts of results.

6.1 Utilization of different Reading Modes while discussing a novel in peer-led literature circles

Students used a variety of reading modes and comprehension strategies in the 116 episodes of discussion that we isolated over the eight 45 min discussions that we analyzed. The Literal comprehension reading mode was used most frequently (44%), as compared to the three other modes ($Z > < +1,96 : Z = 3.25; 4.5 ; 4.92, p = .05$). This would indicate students’ need to better understand factual and referential aspects of the story in talking with peers. By contrast, the Critical mode was the least used (15%), although this may be explained by a lack of external knowledge and maturity, as already suggested. Thus, considering that Aesthetic, Analytic and Critical modes are closely associated with literature reading, we may say that 56% of discussion content concerns responses to a novel’s specific features (see Table 5⁷). There are no statistically significant differences among groups in their use of different reading modes.

Table 5. Percentages of Reading Modes used during discussions ($n=116$ episodes). *A statistically significant difference

Literal comprehension*	44
Aesthetic	24
Textual analysis	17
Critical	15

6.2 Degree of elaboration or quality of content

On the whole, 45% of discussion episodes analyzed demonstrated a very good (30%) or an excellent (15%) degree of elaboration – meaning that students posed their subject and added at least four elements of development related to this subject (see the coding instrument Table 2). In comparing fast-track and regular groups on

⁷ Results have been rounded in all tables.

this aspect, there are no significant statistical differences in average terms; however, it should be noted that fast-track groups show a greater number of excellent episodes, twice as many, in fact, as the regular groups (see table 6 below).

Table 6. *Quality of talk: Differences in number of episodes between groups (n=116 episodes)*

Quality of talk	Fast track Groups (n=55)	Regular Groups (n=61)
In excellent episodes (15%)	11	6
In very good episodes (30%)	20	14
In correct episodes (41%)	16	32
In unsatisfactory episodes (15%)	8	9

In correlating quality of content and type of reading modes, we noted that it is in the Aesthetic ($p<.01$) and Textual ($p<.01$) modes that talk reaches the highest levels of elaboration⁸. Students used the Literal mode most frequently but, in terms of quality, better developed their thoughts when talking about how they engaged themselves in the story or when analyzing textual aspects of literary discourse.

Table 7. *Quality of talk in discussions' episodes: average by Reading modes. * A statistically significant difference*

Literal comprehension	C+
Aesthetic*	B
Textual analysis*	B+
Critical	C+

6.3 Modes of collaboration and types of interaction in peer-led literature circles

Modes of collaboration associated with social or metacognitive aspects, such as Giving feedback to peers or Managing behaviours and tasks, were used in relatively balanced proportions (48%) compared to modes related to more cognitive aspects, such as Articulation or Development of the subject (42%) (see table 8). This balance appears little influenced by the two other variables, namely, reading modes or quality of elaboration. The proportions in which students used the various modes of collaboration remained quite similar from one episode of discussion to the next.

⁸ *Posteriori multiple comparison test, HSD Tukey.*

Table 8. *Percentages of Collaboration Modes used during discussions (n=3.809 units of meaning)*

Give feedback	28
Manage	20
Articulate	11
Develop the subject	31
Residues	11

6.3.1 Management mode

Management mode gathers metacognitive abilities that are of great importance for small peer-led learning groups working without teacher assistance. Statistical analysis showed that, in this case, it was a discriminative factor between the two types of groups: fast-track groups did use Management mode more often than regular groups⁹ (see table 9).

Table 9. *Utilisation of Collaboration modes: differences between groups (n=3,809 units of meaning)*

Modes of collaboration	Fast track Groups	Regular Groups
Feedback	27	29
Manage behaviours and task	24*	16
Articulate subjects	5	9
Develop the subject	32	37
Residues	11	11

* A statistically significant difference

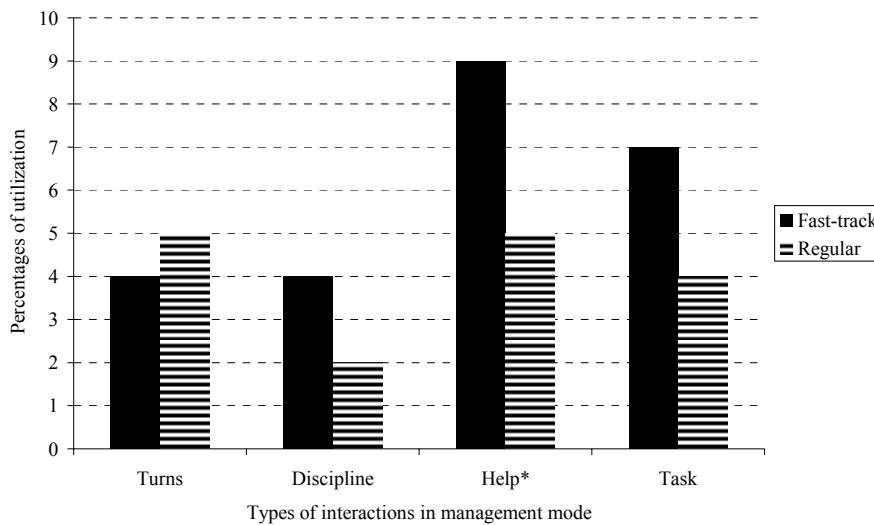
More specifically, in Management mode, comments which aimed to *help peers elaborate* were the most frequent type of interaction used, and more so by the fast-track groups than the regular groups¹⁰ (see Figure 1). It is also interesting to note that it is when they use the Critical mode of reading –the hardest for students of this

⁹ Variance analysis (2 groups x 4 types of interactions) revealed differences between the two types of groups as to the proportions in which they used modes of collaboration ($F(3,114) = 4.87$, $CME = 197.84$, $p < .01$). A manual analysis (a posteriori multiple comparisons, Tukey HSD, with a q critical value of 4.37) revealed a significant difference between fast-track groups and regular groups in their percentage use of the Management mode ($p < .05$). Fast-track groups used it more frequently than regular groups (24% compared to 16%).

¹⁰ A manual analysis (a posteriori multiple comparisons, Tukey HSD, with a q critical value of 4.37) detected a significant difference among groups in the frequency with which they used the interaction *Help peers to elaborate* ($p < .05$), with fast-track groups using them more ($F(1,456) = 7.22$, $CME = 63.18$, $p < .01$), (9% compared to 5%).

age – that fast-track students help each other the most, almost twice as much as the regular groups.

Figure 1. Manage behaviours and tasks: differences between groups (* Significant difference)

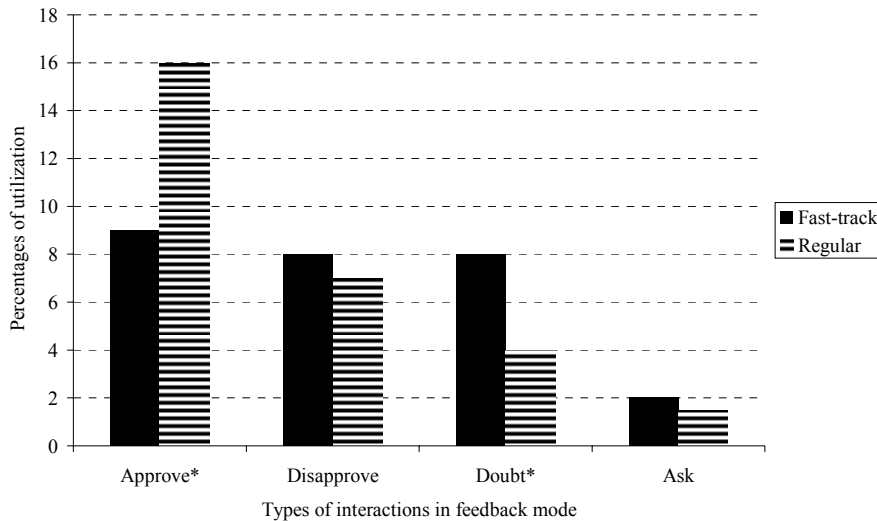


6.3.2 Feedback Mode

In more closely examining the Feedback mode of collaboration, which represented 28% of all units of meaning, we note that comments which aimed to approve peer remarks constituted the most frequent type of feedback. However, fast-track groups used these less and doubted more than regular groups¹¹ (Figure 2). Thus, it would appear that it may be more difficult to gain approval in a fast-track group than in a regular one.

¹¹ A posteriori multiple comparison tests (HSD Tukey) detected significant differences between groups in the frequency with which they used the interaction Approve ($p < .05$): regular groups used it more frequently than fast-track groups (16% compared to 10%); but fast-track groups used it more frequently than regular groups (16% compared to 10%); but fast-track groups more frequently used the interaction Doubt or listen neutrally ($p < .05$), ($F(3,456) = 50.66$, $CME = 42.68$, $p < .0001$) (8% compared to 4%).

Figure 2. Give Feedback: differences between groups (* Significant difference)



6.4 Modalities of co-elaboration between peers: in search of patterns

Our last research question sought to examine whether any correlations existed among our three main variables: reading modes, collaboration modes and quality of talk (or degree of elaboration). In reviewing the results, we observed that it was in the Aesthetic and Analytic modes of reading that talk reached the highest levels of elaboration. Within the collaboration modes, three indicators were shown by statistical analysis to be discriminative factors that might explain how the fast-track groups differed from regular ones.

Those indicators were the percentages of remarks in the Feedback mode of collaboration that aimed to 1) Approve what a peer says; 2) Doubt or listen, remaining neutral; and/or, in Management mode, 3) Help a pair to elaborate. Taken together, they offered cues for exploring the modalities of co-elaboration or interrelation between all variables. To conduct a microanalysis that considered all variables simultaneously, we concentrated on a subset of data. We found it relevant to observe those 15% of episodes ($n=17$) which had reached an excellent degree of elaboration.

6.4.1 Type of relations and work partition in peer-led literature circles

Gilly, Fraisse and Roux (1988) have proposed a typology for analyzing different interactive dynamics in peer-led problem-solving groups in mathematics (teams of two students). In seeking to better understand how pairs of children working by themselves could resolve logical problems in collaboration, they articulated two dimensions of their model: the type of relation between participants (ranging from

approval to confrontation with arguments), which we will designate as relations of *convergence/divergence*; and the type of *work partition*.

a) By thus joining qualitative and quantitative analysis, we established that an episode in which most Feedback remarks aimed to Approve a pair could indicate a convergent relation between participants, while the opposite relation could be qualified as essentially divergent. In the case where neither type clearly dominated, we might speak of a mixed or balanced relation. b) We then sought to better understand how participants shared the elaboration work, by examining all units of meaning spoken by each of the participants that aimed to develop the subject. For example, in one instance, a single participant in a group of five developed the subject while others attended to his 'solo' or monologue, while at other times, two of five students worked in tandem to develop the subject, or all participants worked together.

Thus, by combining these two dimensions (relations and partition of work), we captured different modalities of co-elaboration of meaning in peer-led discussion among five students:

6.4.2 *Microanalysis observations*

Three main observations resulted from this microanalysis. First, it is a convergent-type relation that dominates in regular groups' best episodes of discussion, whereas fast-track groups opt for a more divergent or balanced type of relation. Second, students in both categories of groups worked most often in threes to co-elaborate the meaning in the best episodes. Moreover, we saw that some factors could influence the partition of work – such as overly strong leadership, excessive differences in participants' reading abilities or overly personal or idiosyncratic types of thinking. Third and finally, in terms of Reading modes, we noted a striking equilibrium between aesthetic and efferent stances in those topics discussed within excellent episodes ($n=17$). Nearly half were of an ethical or moral type as, for example, criticizing a character's behaviour, thereby illustrating an aesthetic stance. The other half corresponded to an efferent stance and was associated with literal, analytic and critical modes.

7. IMPLICATIONS

7.1 *Summary*

It would appear that a majority of secondary school teachers rarely if ever use literature circles in their classrooms (Commeyras & DeGross, 1998). For that reason, and in order to help teachers anticipate the learning, benefits, problems and differences which might occur in such peer-led settings, we sought to better understand which, and how, collaboration and reading modes are closely embedded in this decentralized and shared-interpretation classroom activity. Thus, this investigation had two main objectives. The first was to observe and describe at the same time the three main components or variables of literature circles: a) types and proportions of reading modes used by students; b) degree of elaboration of their talk; c) types and pro-

portions of collaboration modes. The second was to compare fast-track groups (very good and good readers) with regular ones (good and struggling readers).

In summary, results show that by offering a modelization of the literary reading process, literature circles are indeed an opportunity for students to integrate all reading modes required to read and interpret a novel on their own. In those excellent episodes which we analyzed more closely, we observed that students adopted, without teacher prompts, a fairly balanced reading posture, roughly half aesthetic and half efferent. Yet analyzing all the episodes showed that the quality of students' talk tended to be better when adopting an aesthetic or a textual analytic mode of reading. Feedback and Management modes of collaboration greatly supported this shared literary interpretation process, consistently occupying about half of the discussion time.

The main differences between groups resided in collaboration modes, with fast-track groups seeming to prefer a more divergent mode of co-elaborating meaning, as compared to regular groups, who were more likely to adopt a convergent one. They also showed a greater tendency to use the management mode than did regular groups, and mainly in order to help others elaborate. In that respect, we noted that explicit teaching of reading strategies, and rhetorical rules for elaborating verbalization provided beforehand by the teacher (see Appendix A), clearly served as intellectual tools to support peers' reciprocal scaffolding and to structure the exchanges (see Table 4 as an example).

All of which leads us to examine certain pedagogical implications stemming from these results.

7.2 Pedagogical implications

As a reading comprehension classroom activity, literature circles permit all participants, whether they talk more or less, to be exposed to a wide range of ideas, reading modes and strategies that they would be unlikely to be able to fully integrate on their own via their journal log – an important point, given that non-expert readers employ a limited variety of strategies. Every peer-led group generated some excellent episodes in which students proved their ability to develop a single subject – at certain times through confronting multiple interpretations, at others, by sharing convergent points of view. Literature circles may thus model dialectic thinking, being the capacity to explore alternative or contradictory possibilities in a given situation, rarely evident in individual written works by students in their early secondary years.

If talk can promote better reading and writing, our long-term observation nonetheless revealed that certain teaching conditions do apply. First, teachers must authentically transfer the responsibility for posing questions to the students and allow them to work independently. Second, they must explicitly teach students how to use reading strategies and elaborate initial impressions. Third, young student readers must be required to verbalize both first impressions/opinions and problem-solving processes.

From a pedagogical point of view, it is evident that reading literature, and talking and writing about it in class, are intricately interwoven activities and all are parts of

a larger process, of a situated learning community. This points up a need to better understand how the benefits of peer discussion might be transferred to individual written tasks, and vice versa. Differences and relations between individually written and oral shared-interpretation processes should be more closely examined in order to better exploit their respective potential.

7.3 *Implications for future research*

From a research perspective, there is a need to further explore how learning or conceptual change may occur within peer groups and might be transferred on an individual level. As Gilly et al. (1988) reported, simple oppositions between peers are, without argumentation, insufficient to help children internalise new notions. We agree with Webb (1982, 1992) that one of the current challenges in collaborative learning is thus to teach students to provide explanations rather than answers, and to more fully develop the explanations they provide others. If – as would appear to be the case – children must not only share their opinions in literature circles, but also discuss their problem-solving procedures, then a central question is raised: what are problem-solving procedures in literature interpretation? This is a didactic question that needs to be addressed.

We personally observed differences in this regard between our fast-track and our regular groups. The students in the regular groups tended to give answers rather than help another student to develop his or her opinions, contrary to students in the fast-track groups. We therefore need to more clearly identify what problem-solving processes in literature might be related to each different reading mode (literal, aesthetic, textual and critical) – the tempting hypothesis being that each reading stance has its own such processes. Making connections with one's own life and criticizing an author's style clearly imply two different reading stances and two different kinds of literary "problem", requiring different sets of knowledge, reasoning modes and writing devices to be solved. Teachers would then do well to become more conscious of these if they are to provide clear modeling and guidance that students can imitate in order to help one another.

In a broader sense, Alvermann et al. (1996:263) raise an interesting research question in considering how text-based discussions may differ from more general discussion. We would add that more research is required to understand whether there may be any specific modalities of collaboration in a literary discussion setting where the problems to be solved are of a narrative or moral nature.

8. CONCLUSION

We are deeply aware that we cannot generalize from our own results to other times and places, and we recognize furthermore that many contextual factors, such as the type of teaching performed prior (Transactional Strategies Instruction), the time of year (May-June), the genre of literature (philosophical adventure) and the sociocultural and affective relations among participants may have influenced our data. Nevertheless, we would like to recall the importance of conducting such in-depth studies

of classroom activity, which have the potential to reveal complex processes at work in classroom teaching and learning.

We do believe that such empirical findings are needed to inform literature circle classroom practice. Our findings contribute to a better understanding of what kinds of talk or discourse have the potential to promote better reading at the middle-school or secondary level. And despite differences that have been observed between fast-track and regular types of groups, it showed that all groups engaged in talk beyond a simplistic, literal comprehension mode. From a sociocultural point of view, we can assert that classroom activities involving peer dialogue, such as autonomous literature circles, constitute teaching tools of definite interest for high-level learning processes like literature interpretation.

Analysis of the modes of collaboration specifically relating to Feedback or Management has, we believe, enabled us to begin pinpointing the various forms that peer scaffolding may take in the specific discursive context of literature circles. It would be necessary to continue analysing which impact may have 'disciplinary logic' and prior teaching on the nature of interactions. Argumentation and regulation procedures do not just happen by themselves but, rather, are anchored in a specific activity, in a field of knowledge. It would then seem important that the study of social interactions in a given field not be dissociated from the type of problems to be solved – and these remain to be defined for reading and literary criticism in a secondary classroom context.

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
APPENDIX A. ECOLOGICAL DESIGN

Teacher's methods	Explicit teaching		Transactional teaching	
	Tasks	Direct and guided reading/writing activities	Dialogue journal	Dialogue journal and Peer-led literature circles
Classroom interactional and control modes	Teacher-whole class (<i>teacher and text centred</i>)	Student-teacher (<i>teacher's scaffolding</i>)	Students-students (<i>peer scaffolding</i>)	
Reading material	Challenging and difficult excerpts from classics (<i>Odysseus/Iliad</i> from Homer)	Self-selected children and young adult novels	Teacher-selected children novel (<i>Call of the Wild</i> by J.London) (pre-experimentation)	Teacher-selected children novel (<i>Friday</i> by M.Tournier) (experimentation)
Teaching phases	Phase A	Phase B	Phase C	
Time of the year	October to March		April to June	

Phase A (from October to March) was the *explicit teaching* phase, wherein the teacher-researcher provided formal tools for reading literature in class, which meant teaching: 1) literary and textual concepts (the *text*); 2) reading strategies (the *reader*) and 3) minimal coherence and rhetorical rules or minimal criteria to develop, elaborate reading strategies into written or oral comments in a classroom (the *context*).

For example, if a student wished to analyze or criticize an author's style in his or her journal, he or she would have been taught that his or her written comment had to respect the following directives (not necessarily in a specific order): situate the passage, name the strategy, quote the supporting text, formulate an opinion with reasons, find reasons against it and explain. That would correspond to the minimal coherence rules for the talking about the reading strategy labelled "Judge" (see the Guided-sheet above).

Excerpt of a Guided-Sheet for Journal writing and Discussion

Reading strategies (reader's mental activities before, while and after reading)		
<i>Feelings</i> 	<i>Judge, criticize</i> 	<i>Question</i> 
✓ Summarise and quote	✓ Summarise and quote	✓ Summarise and quote
✓ Identify your feeling	✓ State your opinion	✓ Formulate a question
✓ Explain it	✓ Give reasons for and against	✓ Formulate an hypothesis
✓ Support with textual clues	✓ Support with textual clues	✓ Support with textual clues

Phase B (from October to March), intertwined with the explicit teaching phase; this was an *individual reading and practice* phase, during which the student, while reading a self-selected novel (from a class list), wrote comments (respecting the above rules) in a dialogue journal to be answered and evaluated by the teacher.

Phase C (from April to June) required all the students to read the same teacher-selected novel, to write in their journal and to have regular *discussions* in small autonomous peer groups to help each other elaborate their oral and written comments.

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