

COOL KIDS' CARNIVAL

Double-voiced discourse in student conversations about literature

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Abstract

In this article we will explore group conversations at lower-secondary school about literary texts perceived as subject specific problems. We will focus on cases interpreted as borderline cases concerning student engagement, i.e., conversations where it is not unambiguously clear whether the students are on-task or off-task. These cases represent pedagogical, interpretative and methodological challenges in that it is not obvious (to either teachers or researchers) how to judge what is going on in the conversations. We will give short descriptive analyses of four conversations before more closely analysing the one that we find the most challenging. Alongside laughter, a prominent feature of all four conversations is a register of what Mikhail Bakhtin calls "double-voiced discourse". Our research question is, "How can we grasp and understand nuances of a double-voiced discourse in student conversations about literature?" Our main framework will be Bakhtin's approach to literary discourse (Bakhtin, 1981; 1984a; 1986), conceived of as dialogic discourse analysis (cf. Skaftun, 2019). We suggest that this approach can make both teachers and educational researchers more sensitive to productive aspects of playfulness in the classroom.

Key words: dialogic discourse analysis; double-voiced discourse; small group conversation; literary conversation; lower secondary school

1. INTRODUCTION

Engaging students in disciplinary (i.e. subject-specific) problem-solving is a major ambition of educational policy and research in Norway and other Western countries. However, it is easy to say that students should become knowledge producers rather than spend their time at school reproducing the knowledge of the teacher, but making such ideas pivotal to classroom practice represents a huge challenge. This requires identifying and modifying what is done in the classroom, how, when, and where it is done, and what roles or positions are available for students to take on in the action occurring in the classroom (Ivanič, 2009). In addition, compared with the relative safety of the order, discipline and detailed planning by teachers which are a hallmark of traditional school practice (Barnes, 1990; Cazden, 2001; Goodlad, 2004), problem-solving in and of itself constitutes a highly open-ended event which is associated with “the beautiful risk of education” (Biesta, 2013), and which is strongly influenced by how the participants respond to the task that is addressed to them (Bakhtin, 1990). Most real-life classrooms are situated somewhere between those extremes—between tightly scripted, disciplined traditional practices, and innovative practices where students are genuinely engaged in solving subject-specific problems. Open-endedness is risky and might in fact be in direct conflict with key values of traditional practices. For example, engagement often manifests itself in loud voices and other noise, and it is also very often accompanied by a sense of playful looseness (Sidorkin, 1999; Wegerif, 2007). It should also be kept in mind that open-ended action and dialogic teaching are not necessarily productive—sometimes classroom noise turns out to be exactly that. Teachers leaning towards the progressive end of the scale find themselves in a complex field of tensions where they have to interpret and make decisions in a vast number of situations throughout the day (Lefstein, 2010). They are torn between a need for order and their aim to engage their students in meaningful activities. As any teacher knows, noisy playfulness and laughter can be challenging phenomena to deal with, in part since it is not always clear what or who is the object of laughter, nor what its purpose is.

In this article we will explore borderline cases from a project exploring student engagement in literary conversations at lower-secondary school. These cases represent pedagogical, interpretative, and methodological challenges in that it is not obvious (to either teachers or researchers) how to judge what is going on. We will give short descriptive analyses of four conversations before more closely analysing the one that we find the most challenging. Alongside laughter, a prominent feature of all four conversations is a register of what Mikhail Bakhtin (1984a) calls “double-voiced discourse”. Our research question is, “How can we grasp and understand nuances of a double-voiced discourse in student conversations about literature?” Our main framework will be Bakhtin’s approach to literary discourse (Bakhtin, 1981; 1984a; 1986), conceived of as dialogic discourse analysis (cf. Skaftun, 2009; 2019).

1.1 Background

Student participation is a key concept in a long tradition of progressive education (Dewey, 1938; Biesta, 2013; Freire & Macedo, 1987), and more specifically in research and professional development oriented towards language in the classroom and dialogic education (Mercer et al., 2019). However, researchers in the field of dialogic education have also emphasized the risk that the discourse about productive dialogue will lead to an *idealization* of dialogic teaching that is at odds with the everyday realities of classroom and school life (Lefstein, 2010; Sedova et al., 2014; Segal & Lefstein, 2016). Certain structural conditions of everyday life at school entail that dialogue on any general scale is “simply impracticable” (Burbules, 1993, pp. 161–162). Hence the concept of *The beautiful risk of education* (Biesta, 2013) implies a need to strike the right balance between order and open-ended chaos such that there is room for the necessary looseness (Lensmire, 1994; Sidorkin, 1999) and creative playfulness (Wegerif, 2005) while maintaining a focus on learning (cf. Asplund & Tanner, 2016). This is an ongoing challenge for Norwegian schools applying the national curriculum, which was implemented in the autumn of 2020, given its emphasis on the renewal of practices in the individual subjects to make space for student participation, explorative activities, critical thinking, and deep learning (Norwegian Directorate of Education and Training, 2020).

Literature education may have a particular function in what will, at best, be a long-term transition from traditional school practices (Cazden, 2001; Goodlad, 2004) to practices where students take on a more active position as participants in the disciplinary discourse. Language arts subjects deal with problems that call for interpretation and negotiation; and those are values that are at the heart of both Norwegian and international educational policy. In earlier Scandinavian research on literature education, conversations have been examined for meaning-making and the role of subject-specific language (e.g., Rødnes, 2014; Rødnes & Ludvigsen, 2009), for the significance of teachers’ questions (Anderson-Bakken, 2015; Dysthe, 2003; Sommerfeld, 2011), and for genres and conversational types (e.g., Hultin, 2006; Tengberg, 2011). More recent studies of literary conversations framed as meaningful problem-solving have shown these to be very productive and capable of promoting substantial student engagement (Gourvenec, 2017; Johansen, 2015; Michelsen et al., 2018; Sønneland, 2019b). These findings provide ample support for the idea of choosing an approach to literature education that involves an element of risk. Michelsen and colleagues (2018) found trainee teachers to be substantially and experientially engaged in exploring and paraphrasing key metaphors in a poem. Johansen (2015) boosted sixth-graders’ engagement by introducing complex modernist literature to them. Gourvenec (2017), exploring how high-achieving students at upper-secondary school responded to literature in open-ended explorative group conversations, found that the students appreciated the tasks and the generous time frames but above all the sense of being positioned as participants in the practice of the discipline. Sønneland (2019b) explored the generalizability of the claim that problem-

based literature education is substantially engaging. She chose lower-secondary school as critical case¹, and she included a large number of cases in order to explore variation in student and group responses to the task. Generally, student engagement was found to be high, although there were a few borderline cases.

The present study draws upon this growing interest in literature education and literary conversations where the text is considered as an open-ended problem, and it also acknowledges the essential link between substantive engagement (Nystrand, 1997), creativity (Wegerif, 2005), and playful looseness (Sidorkin, 1999). More specifically, it is a follow-up study to Sønneland (2018) dealing with the conversations identified as borderline cases in that study. Those conversations could rather easily be perceived as noisy off-task events, or even as instances of subversive hostility. We will here use Bakhtin's dialogic discourse analysis to grasp the nuances at play in those conversations, which find themselves on the boundary between on-task and off-task, to see whether that perception is correct or whether there is more to the borderline conversations than immediately meets the eye.

1.2 Theoretical framework: dialogic discourse analysis

Mikhail Bakhtin is a source of inspiration for many researchers in the huge field of *dialogic education* (Alexander, 2008; Matusov, 2009; Mercer, 2000; Mortimer & Scott, 2003; Nystrand, 1997; Reznitskaya & Wilkinson, 2017; Wells, 1999). In this article, we will make use of Bakhtin's fine-grained approach to the analysis of literary discourse—recently referred to as *dialogic discourse analysis* (hereafter DDA, Skaf-tun, 2019)—in which the utterance is the primary unit of analysis. What occupies Bakhtin the most in his essays associated with dialogism are the dialogic relationships between discursive positions *within* an utterance. Of particular importance in this context are the relationships between the voice of the speakers (or authors) and the voices of other persons represented in what Bakhtin calls *double-voiced dis-course*. In such discourse, the author provides and controls the *dialogizing back-ground* against which the other voices are presented, and thus also positioned. Hence the author has the power to manipulate how others' thoughts, meanings and words are conceived:

The following must be kept in mind: that the speech of another, once enclosed in a con-text, is—no matter how accurately transmitted—always subject to certain semantic changes. The context embracing another's word is responsible for its *dialogizing back-ground*, whose influence can be very great (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 340, our emphasis).

¹ That is, "critical" in the sense of "least likely" (cf. Flyvbjerg, 2006), based on the assumption that the early teens period is when students tend to be the least motivated for school.

The single utterance thus provides a new context—or background—for the words and meanings of others.² The author of the utterance controls this context or background, and she³ can manipulate it on the basis of how she wants the listener or reader to perceive that other person's words. Hence there may exist a wide range of possible dialogic relationships: the author can be friendly or hostile, explorative or exploitative, in agreement or in disagreement, etc. In a given case, the dialogic relationship may be simple to grasp and describe, or it may be highly complex and involve several layers of cognitive, emotional, and ideological (or axiological) meanings, and tensions. Based on the characteristics of the dialogizing background reflected in a double-voiced utterance, Bakhtin distinguishes between *unidirectional* and *vari-directional* double-voiced discourse with stylization and parody, respectively, as prominent examples (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 199).⁴

Parody, often associated with laughter, implying that the author uses the words of another with an intention that has a *direction* different from that of the original utterance. Both voices—the original one and the one setting the words against a new dialogizing background—are recognizable, and it is clear that the intentions of the two voices have different directions—hence they are “vari-directional”. Parody can take on many forms, depending on the concrete relational dynamics at play; and it sets the situation up for parodical laughter. Bakhtin emphasizes that parody is double-voiced, in that along with the somewhat mocking voice; it also *represents* the voice or position being subjected to mockery or laughter. While we often recognize parodical intentions when faced with them, it is not always easy to grasp what the true object of parodical laughter is nor how deep the parody or the laughter really goes:

The depth of the parody may [...] vary. One can parody merely superficial verbal forms, but one can also parody the very deepest principles governing another's discourse. Moreover, parodistic⁵ discourse itself may be used in various ways (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 194).

This is highly relevant in classroom situations, because it is perfectly possible for parody either to target, in a witty manner, the immediate situation of the ongoing conversation, or to be subversively addressed towards foundational structures of classroom control and teacher authority.

² Cf. Van Leeuwen's use of Bernstein's concept of re-contextualization (Van Leeuwen, 2008), and Goffman's Frame Analysis (1974). We will use the term framing in order to grasp the playful manipulations of the situational frameworks throughout one of the conversations, and also stage and staging in order to grasp the sense of distance in the student performance in the conversation.

³ For simplicity, in the following we will use she whenever referring to authors in general.

⁴ Cf. Skaftun (2019) for a more detailed overview of Bakhtin's types of discourse.

⁵ Bakhtin uses parodistic when referring to the specific type of discourse, as opposed to parodical features in general.

Whereas parody is thus fairly simple to define and also to understand based on everyday experience, *stylization* is a slightly more elusive concept. Even so, it also represents a useful category when dealing with ambiguities and playful discourse in the classroom. Bakhtin introduces stylization in opposition to *imitation*, which strives for a merging of voices. Stylization, then, reflects an awareness of representing a specific style and also an awareness of the point of view expressed by that style. The result of stylization is that the original style, point of view and discourse are “rendered conditional”:

Stylization presupposes style; that is, it presupposes that the sum total of stylistic devices that it reproduces did at one time possess a direct and unmediated intentionality and expressed an ultimate semantic authority. [...] The stylizer uses another’s discourse precisely as other [...] (W)hat is important to the stylizer is the sum total of devices associated with the other’s speech precisely as an expression of a particular point of view. He works with someone else’s point of view. Therefore, a certain shadow of objectification falls precisely on that very point of view, and consequently it becomes conditional. [...]

Conditional discourse is always double-voiced discourse. Only that which was at one time unconditional, in earnest, can become conditional. The original direct and unconditional meaning now serves new purposes, which take possession of it from within and render it conditional [italics added]. This is what distinguishes stylization from imitation. Imitation does not render a form conditional, for it takes the imitated material seriously, makes it its own, directly appropriates to itself someone else’s discourse (Bakhtin, p. 189).

In our analysis, an important category will be precisely discourse where the institutional discourse of the discipline and the teacher is *rendered conditional*. This happens when students actively make use of phrases and styles from teaching sessions or from typical school instructions, while at the same time signalling an awareness that they are using an alien discourse. Whether the instances of double-voiced discourse that we find are uni-directional or vari-directional is at times difficult to determine, owing to the existence of quite complex layers of ambiguity.

What is perfectly clear, however, is that the students are engaged in playful and creative communication. We will explore how these features contribute somewhat paradoxically to the creation of a dialogic space (Wegerif, 2013) for substantial engagement (Nystrand, 1997) in and with the disciplinary discourse of literature. This space is not entirely serious, but neither is it entirely the opposite. With some obvious reservations, we suggest similarities between what happens in one of our group conversations and Bakhtin’s understanding of carnival. Profanation is an essential feature of carnival, and it contains “a whole system of carnivalistic debasings and bringings down to earth [...] linked with the reproductive power of the earth and the body” (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 123). Our foregrounded case suggests that subversive creativity in conversation might have similar reproductive powers, adding vitality and a sense of student participation into the disciplinary practice.

2. METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

2.1 The context: problem-based literature teaching

This article is based on data from a multiple-case study (Yin, 2009) of problem-based literature education with a particular focus on student-led group conversations (Sønneland, 2019b). The design was experimental to some extent, and aimed to explore student responses to open-ended problems in L1 literature education. The conversations were all introduced and framed by the researchers (we were both present in each of the classrooms). They took place during a 45-minute lesson in three ninth-grade classrooms (called 9A, 9B and 9D; 9C was not part of the study here). In each classroom there were six groups of 4–5 students—hence a total of 18 groups. After the introduction, the students first read individually for 5–6 minutes and then engaged in a group discussion which lasted for 10–14 minutes. The last part of the lesson was a whole-class discussion led by the researchers where the students were asked to share their ideas.

The task we presented to the students consisted in trying to make sense of a text that we genuinely considered difficult to grasp. We used short stories representing different aspects of literary complexity in the three classes. In 9A we used Raymond Carver's "Little things" (in Norwegian translation); in 9B Franz Kafka's "Before the law" (also in Norwegian translation); and in 9D a text called "Run for your life" ("Løp for livet") by a famous Norwegian novelist, Roy Jacobsen. Carver's text describes a quarrel between a couple, where their little child is literally torn between them. What actually happens is unclear, and our students became massively engaged in solving this problem. "Before the law" is a simple enough story if you disregard the opening sentences: "Before the law sits a gatekeeper. To this gatekeeper comes a man from the country who asks to gain entry into the law." The students saw the interpretative challenge presented by this opening, and although they were not able to describe how this manipulation of the setting of the story immediately calls for a figurative reading, their discussions all turned on this key feature of the text. The last text, "Run for your life", is a relationship drama involving two boys and the father of one of them. Beneath the actions described as taking place in the present, there are subtle references to past actions and complex relationships that call upon the reader to reconstruct the underlying story in order to understand the plot as it unfolds in the present.

2.2 Making the case: double-voiced discourse as a liminal space

General findings from the 18 conversations studied show that, in general, the students were substantially engaged in disciplinary problem-solving (Sønneland, 2019b). This engagement was associated with high levels of positive energy or intensity (Sønneland & Skaftun, 2017). In some cases, however, this intensity seemed to

draw the conversation off-track, away from the task at hand and into a discursive register of parody and even mockery (Sønneland, 2018). Students signalling a distance to tasks and activities in the classroom is not unfamiliar experience for teachers and classroom researchers. Still, this phenomenon is difficult to deal with because it is so evasive. The borderline groups identified in the data differed from each other on many counts, but they all left us with the impression that they were distancing themselves from what they were doing. They all seemed to draw their conversations into a liminal space between being serious about the task and being “quasi-serious” about it. The discursive space in which the students found themselves apparently had what Bakhtin called “loopholes” (Bakhtin, 1984), through which speakers may escape the positions determined by a given task.

Earlier studies of the 18 conversations focused on those—the overwhelming majority—who stayed safely within the task. In that context, two of the conversations (both from 9D) were defined as borderline cases in terms of loyalty to the task (Sønneland, 2018). In this study we have chosen to broaden the marginal domain by including two conversations (from 9A) where noisy laughter is a prominent feature. The four conversations illustrate different aspects of double-voiced discourse from the vague borderline between on- and off-task activities. Against this background we will focus on the most subversive and challenging conversation.

2.3 Data collection and analytical approach

Our data consist of transcribed video-supported audio recordings of 18 group conversations and interviews with the teachers, against a background of field notes from 17 observed lessons in the three classrooms in the eighth and ninth grades. All conversations were recorded,⁶ and transcribed verbatim with indications of pauses, overlaps, unclear passages, and some descriptives, such as “(laughs)” (see Appendix 5 for transcription key). The first step of the further analysis performed as part of the present study was to form and verbalize images of the four conversations considered to be borderline cases (Sønneland, 2018) as meaningful wholes. For this purpose, we read and listened to the conversations several times, and we both wrote memos in which we tried to identify characteristic features, before integrating them into a final shared image of the conversations (see Appendix 1). Group 2 in 9D (“D2”) came across as more complex than the others in many respects (it will become clear why in our later explanation), and for this reason that conversation was subjected to further close reading. As a result, that conversation is foregrounded in the following while the other three constitute a variational context.

All coding was conducted in NVivo. Speaker cases were identified in all transcriptions (see Appendix 2). Further coding was conducted in a stepwise manner, moving

⁶ *The conversations were recorded by means of Zoom audio-video recorders. The video was mainly meant to support the time-consuming work of separating and identifying voices in the transcription process.*

from substantive (yet descriptive) codes to theoretical codes involving interpretation to a greater extent (cf. Maxwell, 2009). Based on a close reading of the foregrounded conversation in D2, we agreed that it was appropriate to divide that conversation into three meaningful main parts in relation to the task of discussing a text. Alongside this, we established six categories for characterizing what the conversation is about. One prominent feature was 1) Facilitation—easily recognizable in questions put to others. Further, along with students' focusing on the 2) Text, we also coded for 3) Associations, 4) Comprehension (degree of/lack of comprehension), 5) Social situation, and 6) Evaluation of the text. Categories 3-6 are used for utterances that are not directed towards the understanding of the text. Associations are typically personal ("I have been to Singapore", for example, based on Singapore being mentioned in the text), whereas comprehension and evaluation are metacognitive categories addressed as separate topics. These categories, cross-referenced with the speaker cases and the distribution of speech, allow us to answer the question of who says what and when.

The final coding procedure concerned discourse types, that is, the issue of how the students talk. Direct dialogic exchanges were coded as situated dialogue. This kind of dialogue is the model for what Bakhtin called the "active type of double-voiced discourse": a rejoinder in a situated dialogue isolated from its context is a prominent example of how an utterance relates to other utterances without necessarily making explicit references. However, it is not particularly useful to consider situated dialogue as active double-voiced discourse—in a sense, it is double-voiced not by analysis, only by definition. Hence situated dialogue is not considered as double-voiced discourse here, but as a category of its own. Further, we divided the remaining talk into that which is primarily oriented towards its referential object (direct, unmediated discourse), and that where the voices of others are activated (double-voiced discourse). Finally, the sequences coded as double-voiced discourse were further coded as either uni-directional (stylization) or vari-directional (parodistic discourse). All coding was undertaken jointly by us as an interpretive community. Any uncertainties were discussed and rephrased until we reached agreement.

The coding procedure was meant to support the detailed analysis and interpretation of the interaction by means of dialogic discourse analysis. Grasping and displaying dialogic relations in the group conversations implies relating to them like textual wholes,⁷ supported by experiences from participating in the live event. As researchers we respond to speaking persons as subjects,⁸ and from our outside

⁷ Cf. Skaftun (2019) for a more elaborated discussion of the classroom as a text and questions of author-ity in the interplay between teachers, students and observing researchers.

⁸ In «From Notes Made 1970-71» Bakhtin lists three types of relations: 1) between objects, 2) between subject and object, and 3) between subjects (Bakhtin, 1986, p. 138), which appears all through his authorship. Dialogism concerns relations between subjects. This approach calls for an interesting discussion of the dynamics between first-person perspective and third-

position we create images of the interplay of voices and contextual features with the best of our sensitivity. As a means for making the events evident to the reader, and in line with Bakhtin's analytical practice, we will use a range of metaphors in order to describe aspects of relational power, and metaphors targeting aspects of distance and play. The reference to carnival is an overall metaphor. In carnival participants consciously enter extraordinary positions on a stage and perform actions (cf. Goffman's (1974) theatrical frame), all of which are marked by the double nature of parody.

3. ANALYSIS

In the following, the four group conversations considered as borderline cases will be briefly introduced as an immediate context for the foregrounded conversation in group D2. This context displays different aspects of double-voiced discourse. As such, it is an important link between the clearly subversive features in D2, and the rest of the 18 conversations marked by a high degree of on-task engagement among the students.

3.1 Borderline cases—forms of ambiguity and laughter

The four borderline conversations last for between eight and thirteen minutes; all participant students engage in talking (see Appendix 2 for a detailed overview of the distribution of speech in the four groups). If we consider the number of words spoken per minute as an indication of the energy of each conversation, we obtain an image that is quite well in line with our immediate impressions of the groups (Table 1).

person perspective in ethnographic research (cf. for example, Perregaard, 2018). This discussion, however, is not in the scope of this article.

Table 1. Words spoken per minute in the four conversations

	9A, Group 2 (A2)	9A, Group 3 (A3)	9D, Group 2 (D2)	9D, Group 5 (D5)
Words/minute	236	231	202	266

The two conversations in 9A are longer: the students are equally eager to talk, and there is a large amount of overlap. There is much positive energy in these conversations. The call for interpretation derives from the turn towards the laughter. The four students in A3 are all active (cf. speech distribution in Appendix 2); and in our view they are unambiguously engaged in the interpretation of aspects of the text. At one point, however, a playful remark recontextualizes the collective process of reasoning, and the conversation shifts into a parodical register. In fact, the entire group continues talking for a long time in a kind of quasi-analysis where they cultivate the art of over-interpretation. At the same time, they seem to be actively and consciously aware that this is what they are doing (cf. Appendix 1 for a more elaborated summary of the conversation). The laughter here is linked to the humorous effect of the quasi-disciplinary activity. It is not, however, the discourse as such that is the object of parody. It is rather a (bad) manner of behaving in the discourse (that of overly serious over-interpretation) that is laughed at, meaning that the valuation mechanisms reflected in the conversation are, paradoxically, closely linked to disciplinary practices. The students as a collective are playing the role of parodying subject and the object of the parody at the same time. This playful quasi-seriousness is creative in ways that are aligned with the disciplinary practice and the task at hand.

A2 is also characterized by ambiguous engagement. Some of the students appear to be very interested, but in ways that rises suspicion of display. Two of the boys are very insistent in their interpretation of peculiarities of the text. It is difficult for the other students in the group as well as for researchers to decide whether they are serious, or whether they are knowingly staging over-interpretation. Laughter seems to be suppressed throughout the conversation, but bursts out here and there, indicating that the participants are not sure of how to understand the situation. The ambiguity, thus, binds the energy in the group. This kind of ambiguous engagement resembles procedural engagement (Nystrand & Gamoran, 1989), but it is wrapped in a display of positive interest that is difficult to understand. As such, it represents a didactic challenge for teachers. Awareness of the phenomena is and a start for reflecting practitioners.

The two groups from 9D were the ones identified as borderline cases in the previous study of levels of engagement in the three classrooms (Sønneland, 2018). The energy in group 5 is explosive from the start, as indicated by the higher number of words per minute (cf. Table 1). The students are talking about the text ("Run for your life"), but there is a strong drift away from the task towards nonsensical fun. The

overall initial impression of group D5 is that the students are having fun, teasing each other and rejecting the task; and thus signalling a distance from the situation and the task at hand. Much energy is played out accompanied by laughter in a register of pure looseness. The conversation is therefore the most unambiguously off-task conversation, where energy and laughter represent disturbing noise and counter-productive leakage of energy from the task.

Group D2 is less energetic and more marked by students working out ways of positioning relative to the task. In what follows we will further explore this conversation in detail.

3.2 9D, Group 2: cool kids' carnival

The D2 group is a special one. It is dubious whether the same kind of playful energy (and laughter) observed in all the previous groups occurs here as well, as it is perceived as the one with the possible darkest energy (cf. Sønneland, 2018). By accident, all of the “cool kids in the class”, as the teacher put it (Boys 2–4), were grouped together. Talking to the teacher in the situation, it was clear to us what the teacher meant by this phrase. It was not her evaluation of them, and neither was it a reference to their status in the class. It was merely a reference to a feature of their behaviour and self-evaluation as a community of cool kids with values clearly rooted elsewhere than in school and classroom culture⁹. They were joined by a single girl and another boy did not seem to be included in the community of coolness. The three “cool kids” together account for approximately 80 percent of the utterances and 85 percent of the words spoken in the conversation (see Appendix 2 for a detailed overview of the distribution of speech); and they also act out dominance in other, more qualitative ways. One of them—Boy 4 (B4)—is often addressed by the others and asked to say something, meaning that he stands out as a key point of reference in the social dynamics. Boy 1 (B1), the “uncool” boy, tries to establish a position for himself at the beginning of the conversation precisely by asking B4 to start talking, but that position and the dialogic link to B4 is taken over by B3, who develops and maintains it until the end. Let us have a closer look at the first two minutes of the conversation in order to obtain a sense of what is going on (Table 2 below; Appendix 3 contains a complete transcription of the conversation, translated into English).

⁹ Based on teachers' reference and our own perception cool here means “unenthusiastic, lukewarm, sceptical” to school and classroom discourse (<https://www.wordhippo.com/what-is/the-meaning-of-the-word/cool.html>)

3.2.1 *Opening a dialogue or entering a stage?*

At the start of the conversation, all five students signal some distance to the task and the roles that they are entering, but they nevertheless do enter them and start talking about the text. B3 stands out here with his consistent gravitation towards the role of facilitator—or keeper of the frame (cf. Table 2).

Reading and listening to this conversation, we sense a tension between conflicting forces played out in front of the recorder. The students are on stage not only as self-aware teenagers as such, but also as self-aware teenagers in a situation determined by their teacher. They have recourse to ways of “rendering the discourse conditional” (cf. Bakhtin, 1984, p.190). In other words, they demonstrate that they are not entirely or directly oriented towards the object of the conversation. For example, B4 accepts that the frame requires them to explore the meaning of the text, but he does this in a style that seems to belong to the “community of buddies”. At one point, he even stages a need to translate between the two styles or social languages (cf. utterance 24: “shit” -> “things”). Nevertheless, even if they clearly signal that they are aware that they are performing their roles within the frame of an educational task determined by school, they do perform their roles. The discourse of the task is in fact predominantly used in order to actually explore the text. They seem to accept that the power over the dialogizing background to their conversation is in the hands of the teacher and the school. Only one of them, B3, does not. Instead, he seems to challenge the dialogizing background of the conversation by assuming a position as the gatekeeper or a keeper of the frame.

At the very start of the conversation, we can see how B3 acquires that position in competition with B1. During the first two minutes accounted for above, he is not really able to control the conversation. The other group members seem eager to share what they have seen in the text, and B3’s attempts to create a quasi-serious discussion are repeatedly interrupted and disregarded. At one point, he even joins in and describes his own experiences (utterances 22 and 25). Towards the end of this initial sequence, however, he finds the space to take charge of the conversation by asking questions that determine the direction of the talk.

Table 2. 9D group 2—Annotated translation of the first two minutes of the conversation

Transcription	Comments
1. B1: B4 – is there something you would like to say to them?()	<i>B1 and B3 compete for the initiative – both of them by positioning B4 as the first speaker, and B3 in a manner that clearly “renders the discourse conditional”.</i>
2. B2:(leaning into the camera) What’s this?	
3. B3: OK, so we’ve read “Run for your life”, and now B4 will tell us what it’s about – right, B4?	<i>B1 resists by emphasizing the order of speakers, but he retreats</i>
4. B1: [first...]	
5. B2: Yes – or. What was it. Well, did you get what you were reading?	<i>B2 independently addresses the textual problem and invites the others to share their understanding</i>
6. B1: No.	
7. G1: No.	<i>B3 grasping for control – and for his position as keeper of the frame</i>
8. B3: Yes of course [but B4 is the one who should begin]	
9. G1: No. I think it was a bit unclear.	
10. B1: (?)	<i>G1 insists on completing her utterance, in spite of B3’s framing</i>
11. G1: They started talking about someone called Øistein and then a plane ticket, and then suddenly a jacket, so it was a bit like (.) CONFUSING ¹ .	
12. B3: [that was hard VIOLENCE to B4]	<i>B3’s side comment refers to his efforts as facilitator: he tried to give the word to B4, but G1 interrupted .</i>
13. B2: Well, I just read, well I read the first sentence and then I was just like; OK. And then I read the next sentence and I didn’t understand shit, I fell off the whole thing.	
14. G1: [Yeah]	<i>B2 takes over from G1</i>
15. B3: I’m dyslexic. I ehm. (.)	
16. B4: Øistein’s the buddy of this I-person. And this DUDE is talking (about/with?) the father	<i>B4 ignores B3 and continues the talk about the text</i>
17. B2: Yeah, and one of them doesn’t have a father. And then he was going to a sports team or something like that.	
18. B4: And then he started crying.	<i>B3 acts as the “interested facilitator” – he mimics a teacher’s supportive follow-up in the typical Initiative–Response–Feedback structure of classroom talk.</i>
19. B2: Yeah. (.) ehm (.) And he’d grown older. I think.	
20. B3: Yes, and so?	<i>B3 comments on the text – i.e. he leaves the position as facilitator</i>
21. B2: I think he forgot his jacket.	
22. B3: The father was the one who forgot his jacket. Or something.	<i>B4 deliberately uses slang² – and demonstratively corrects himself; he is positioning himself in the social group, but he is also on task</i>
23. B2: How do you know he didn’t forget his jacket? (.)	
24. B4: ALRIGHT, ALRIGHT, BASICALLY they were supposed to run back home to get his SHIT – his things – because he’d left everything in the pocket of his jacket. Then he’d taken the wrong jacket and because of that they had to, no they didn’t have the time to run back home, and then they didn’t get on=	<i>B2 prepares the ground for associations to weed-culture slang (using translation into English to activate the drug-related sense of “we tripped”)</i>
25. B3: And then they forgot something or other.	
26. B2: (reading aloud by himself and laughing) WE TRIPPED. We tripped. (.) Hey, you, they didn’t just forget the jacket, they forgot the whole shit, right.	<i>B4 signals that he catches the reference</i>
27. B4: Yeah.	
28. B2: They forgot the shit..	<i>B2 elaborates – “shit” here probably referring (on one level) to drugs</i>
29. B4: Plane ticket and passport and wallet.	
30. B3: Yes, and then... Does anyone think they understand what this text is about?	<i>B3 reclaims his position as facilitator and keeper of the frame</i>
31. B4: Yes, almost.	
32. B2: It looks a bit like eh=	<i>B3 emphasizes his position as facilitator]</i>
33. B3: =What is your view on this text, MISTER (B2’s last name)?	
(2:06)	<i>B2 answers the question, but from here on B3’s parodical framing is a prominent part of the talk</i>

3.2.2 Who says what and when?

The three dominant boys (B2–B4) produce most of the utterances and an even larger share of the total number of words spoken during the conversation (cf. Appendix 2). B1 seems to retreat after his first attempt to position himself as facilitator; after that he contributes only short utterances when explicitly addressed. The girl is more

active. She elbows her way into the opening sequence, and seems more inclined to fill the spot available for her between the school-related task and the complex social event unfolding in the group. B4 is consistently invited by B3 into a prominent position in a quasi-serious response to the given task. However, B4 does not quite seem to play along. In fact, he is the one who contributes the most to the exploration of the text. His rather long utterance in the opening sequence (utterance 24) is indicative of his position in the group: he tends to stay somewhat in the background but enters when ready to sum up the problem being discussed.

Turning towards what they talk about during their eight minute conversation, we see that facilitation accounts for 20 percent of the conversation where B3 is the main contributor to this feature (cf. Appendix 4). He asks many questions of the group (see Table 3), and performs a kind of supportive framing and follow-up when the others are talking. This role is clearly a mask, as we will explore further below. Even so, the text is the major topic of attention (43%). B2 and B4 are the ones contributing the most to this category. B4's contributions are quite consistently related to the text, even if he frames them in a social jargon belonging outside the classroom; whereas B2 is more "all over the place" even when he is making a point about the text. B4 clearly makes the most substantial contributions (cf. Appendix 4; cf. also the transcription of the whole conversation in Appendix 3), but B2 also seems seriously engaged in the puzzles of the text and some of his associations are more or less relevant to the understanding of the text. As we have seen, B2 is also the one who led the way into the initial exploratory phase, in a manner indicating both an associative approach and referential curiosity devoid of pretence.

B3 leaves his role as facilitator on a few occasions to join the talk about the text, but it is in that role that he contributes the most to the conversation. He asks many questions (cf. Table 3), and they seem to fit into a plan for conversational progression corresponding to typical didactic frameworks for literary conversation. The first part deals mainly with content, i.e., questions concerning narrative action, plot, and relationships between characters. The best name for the second part is less obvious, but we have chosen complexity, mainly on the basis of how B3 directs attention by means of putting explicit questions to the others, typically asking them whether they have seen anything interesting in the text and what—if anything—makes the text interesting. Hence, text complexity is more of an underlying contextual reference ("complexity is interesting" is a statement associated with the disciplinary discourse) than an explicit theme. Finally, in the third part, the conversation—governed by the same boy and his frequent questions—turns towards the students' experiences from reading the text, meaning that it deals more with issues of subjective and emotional response. These three parts, thus, represent both a chronological structure and a thematic macrostructure.

Table 3. B3's facilitating questions during the conversation

Part	Line	Utterance
1 "Content"	3	B3: OK, so we've read "Run for your life", and now B4 will tell us what it's about – right, B4?
	30	B3: Yes, and then... Does anyone feel that they understand what this text is about?
	33	B3: =What is your view on this text, MISTER (B2's last name)?
2 "Complexity"	41	B3: ehm (.) So, do you interpret [sic!] anything interesting about this text, and why is it so hard to understand?
	43	B3: B1?
	45	B3: = Do you interpret [sic!] anything interesting about this text?
	47	B3: OK. Why is it so difficult to understand?
	77	B3: Well, then, did you guys feel this was an interesting text?
3 "Personal experience"	90	B3: Yes, I know. But (?) (.) So, B1, what was your favourite part of this thing?
	114	B3: So, B1, what was the best part of the text?
	134	B3: Would you have liked to see a part two of this text?

In the first part, as we have seen, B3 is not in control. The discussion on what the text is about spawns independently and spontaneously among the others, whereas B3 is struggling to frame the discussion post hoc; he is, in a sense, imposing discursive direction onto a discussion that already has it. However, utterance 41 implies a shift of attention towards how the text might be conceived of as interesting. The responses mainly emphasize that it is not interesting, because it is too difficult to understand. Hence complexity—mainly in terms of how it affects comprehension—is a label we can use for the second part of the conversation. Finally, B3 leads the group into sharing personal experiences and also evaluations of the text.

Table 4 shows what the students talk about in the three phases more or less imposed by B3.

Table 4. What the students talk about in the three parts of the conversation (coverage in NVivo)

	Facilitation	The text	Associa- tions	Comprehen- sion	Evaluation	Situation
1. Content (%)	19	63	1	16	0	0
2. Complexity (%)	29	31	15	4	9	13
3. Experience (%)	9	41	7	1	19	23

In the first part, 63 % of the words spoken are oriented towards the text. The comprehension category here largely consists of spontaneous outbursts such as “I didn’t understand shit” (utterance 13). The facilitation category is also prominent in the first part, but in the second part it actually accounts for almost one-third of all words spoken. This reflects B3’s struggle for dominance over the conversation, i.e., his efforts to seize authorial power over the dialogizing background. The table also indicates that the attention drifts away from a marked focus on the text in the first part towards evaluation of the text in the second and third parts, well in line with the direction of B3’s facilitation. Just as importantly, however, it seems that the text as such maintains its position as the dominant point of reference throughout the conversation.

The final category, “Situation”, includes three incidents coded as a turn to the social situation. In the third part, towards the end of the conversation, there are some comments about the recorder as well as a sequence of mocking discourse following a question to G1: “What does it feel like to be the only girl in this group?” Such incidents are perhaps to be expected given a typical decline over time in students’ focus on the task. By contrast, the incident in the second part is more interesting and calls for attention. This sequence marks the transition to the third part of the conversation, see Table 5.

Table 5. B3's facilitating questions during the conversation

Transcription	Comments
83. B3: Judging from B4's comment, I would say it's pretty straightforward what happens in the text.	B3's intonation, while well aligned with his
84. B2: B3—you didn't read it, did you?	slightly formal phrasing,
85. B3: Yes, I tried.	signals that he is con-
86. B2: Is that why you're not answering anything? (3s)	scious of using this regis-
87. B3: Eh, but it was an interesting task. (everyone laughs) (5s)	ter or style
88. B1: Yeah right, B3.	
89. B2: You know we're not graded on this, don't you?	B2 responds to B3's use
90. B3: Yes, I know. But (?) (.) So, B1, what was your favourite part of this thing?	of a formal register asso-
	ciated with school dis-
	course

At this stage, B3 has already tried to shift the attention away from exploration of what happens in the text. He has asked whether the others felt that the text was interesting (utterance 77). In utterance 83 he chooses a new strategy: he sums up the conversation so far while at the same time positioning B4 as key participant. This time he is interrupted by B2, who challenges B3's position in the conversation, although he uses a somewhat playful tone. There is a pause before B3 answers (utterance 87), and when he does, he uses a tone of voice suggestive of a loyal student characterizing a school assignment as "interesting"—but he has his tongue in his cheek, and the collective laughter that ensues clearly indicates that the group recognizes what he is doing—with the possible exception of B1, who might be signalling earnest disbelief (utterance 88). B2 then comments on the situation as a whole—that is, on B3's framing efforts—and suggests that B3 is performing his role "in bad faith", trying to curry favour with the teacher. B3 responds briefly to this before falling back into his role as facilitator of the conversation as a whole—or as author responsible for the dialogizing background.

3.2.3 Who says what when—and how?

We have tried above to pinpoint who says what and when in the conversation. In that context, we have seen that in order to answer those questions, we also need to pay close attention to how the students talk, or in other words to how they relate to the others, to the situation, to the task and, in particular, to the text as the problem presented to them. We hope that we have already indicated the intentional depths played out in this conversation. The example discussed above, where B2 explicitly relates to B3's masked role play, is a good illustration of the kind of depth that comes from rendering words and discourse condition.

Dialogic discourse analysis (DDA) in the spirit of Bakhtin implies exploration of the open-ended field of meaning and intentional play that opens up in a situation

such as this. What B3 does in this sequence is to activate the voice and register of well-intended pedagogical scaffolding, as well as the voice and register of an ambitious student striving to perform in accordance with his teacher's expectations. One could imagine that—if he really suffers from dyslexia, as he claims—he could have subordinated these voices to his own authorial powers, making it easier to grasp his critical and satirical intentions. However, as things stand, B3 does not display any clear counter-intention to the voices that he renders conditional. B2 is faced with this ambiguity, and on the semantic surface of the words actually spoken it seems that he responds as if he has caught B3 in flagrante trying to perform the role of a clever student. However, it is just as possible that he recognizes the parodical pretence of B3 and himself responds with similar pretence. While we cannot be sure, it is at least clear that it might be wise to broaden our understanding of discursive playfulness at school, and DDA (cf. Skaftun, 2019) might be a meaningful approach to situated dialogue such as that in our example.

Analysing the conversation as a textual whole, we have tried to determine the dominant orientation of individual utterances and sequences of utterances. In this context, we have coded approximately 30 percent of the conversation as situated dialogue where single utterances are primarily linked to adjacent utterances. These sequences are largely confrontational but have a playful tone, as in the above example, and they call for a close reading of how the students relate to each other in the immediate situation. The remainder of the conversation allows us to apply Bakhtin's discourse types on the conversation as a whole. Approximately 40 percent of the conversation is coded as direct, unmediated discourse (Bakhtin's category I) while the remaining 30 percent of it is coded as double-voiced discourse (18% stylization, 12.3% parodistic discourse). Table 6 shows the distribution of the speech across situated dialogue and Bakhtin's discourse types.

Table 6. Distribution of speech across situated dialogue and discourse types

	Situated dialogue	Direct, unmediated discourse	Double-voiced discourse
Distribution (%)	28.5	41.2	30.3 (18 + 12.3)

The instances of direct, unmediated discourse are largely related to talk about the text, where the students seem to make serious attempts to explore and express what they think; they seem to be “working with understanding” in the words of Douglas Barnes (2008). The utterances in question could be characterized as single-voiced expressions of explorative thinking.

At times (18% of the conversation as a whole), this talk is marked by social jargon (frequently in English), a social language, or a conventional style associated with

being cool. Implicit references to weed culture are prominent examples,¹⁰ along with nonsensical wit as well as words and phrases indicating a kind of “cool outsidersness” in the school context. When this language or style is activated, the discourse becomes double-voiced: in addition to the referential aspect of the discourse, the students are clearly making use of a social language that is alien to the school context. The students acknowledge the status of this language and are in a sense positioning themselves within it. We have coded sequences where such active positioning seems more prominent than the referential object of discussion as stylization, since the students are making use of a style other than their own, and since we can sense both the style and the attempts at using it.¹¹ As Bakhtin (1984, p. 193) would put it, the students are speaking in someone else’s discourse and their intentions are aligned with the intentions inherent in the alien discourse (cf. Bakhtin’s characteristic unidirectional double-voiced discourse). However, the discourse they are using is to some extent subversive relative to the school discourse. By using this discourse, the students are playing with the position they are given as students at school and in the specific task.

Parodistic discourse (12.3% of the conversation as a whole) is similar to stylization in that the speaker uses someone else’s discourse, but “in contrast to stylization, parody introduces into that discourse a semantic intention that is directly opposed to the original one” (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 193). In other words, the intentions of the speaker and the alien discourse have different directions: they are vari-directional. In his consistent positioning as facilitator, B3 uses the words and discourses of others with an intention of his own. This intention is not necessarily hostile in nature. Rather, it consists primarily in making the discourse of framing and facilitation visible as such. We have seen that B3, in his role as facilitator, establishes a stepwise progression from exploration of the textual content, through a discussion of textual complexity, towards personal experience of the text, while at the same time signalling parodistic distance to this discursive structure.¹² If he were an ambitious student

¹⁰ Cf. lines 24, 26 and 28; it is further developed in line 102, which refers to being high on drugs and having “2 grams in the BLUNT” (“blunt” is a slang term for a hollowed-out cigar which can be filled with cannabis) (cf. Appendix 3).

¹¹ Stylization borders onto imitation, as Bakhtin elaborates on this concept (1984, p. 190), and he does discuss intermediate forms. Imitation in our case would involve speakers who had fully integrated the discourse in question. The kind of exploring and navigating between discursive positions and identities seen here can be observed in teenager discourse both at and outside school.

¹² The structure parodied by B3 resembles a familiar set of questions derived from the influence of reading assessments over the last 15 years in Norwegian literacy education: Questions addressing the textual surface meaning (finding information); questions addressing deeper level textual meaning (interpretation); and finally, questions calling for personal judgement (evaluation). Eva Hultin (2006) explores speech genres in whole class conversation about literature, and points out that these genres are challenged by parodistic genres. Interestingly, she

trying to respond adequately to the task, his utterances would have constituted unidirectional imitation or semi-stylization. B3's quasi-serious facilitation efforts represent a reaccentuation (Bakhtin, 1981) of a recognizable speech genre in a parodical register; it entails that both the facilitation as such and the utterances produced within this frame are set against a new dialogizing background with B3 as responsible author. We could say that he is claiming authorship of the situation and thus challenging—or at least rendering conditional—the authority of the teacher and of the classroom context.

The other students (except perhaps B1) seem aware that B3 is not being serious, and they accept his behaviour as one of many ways of signalling a distance. This might be the case for B3 himself as well, but he actually seems to be carried away by his own creativity and consistent role play, which turns the entire situation, with all of its participants, into the object of parody. The playful confrontations involving the claim that B3, being a dyslectic, actually avoided the reading task and is performing the role of a responsible student to cover that up can be seen as an attempt by the fellow students to defend themselves against the parodistic authority of B3. B4 explicitly addresses B3's parodical play with the role of facilitator in line 44, where he exclaims "Stop kidding, this is serious!" This utterance is hardly meant as a defence of serious talk but rather intended as a signal that B4 is at the same distanced level as the one B3 is staking a claim to using his parodical authority; in a sense, B4 is rejecting the participant role offered to him by B3 as parodical author.

Considering the conversation as a text, we thus see a real-life version of a struggle between authorial aspirations and characters claiming their independence, which also clearly reflects similar asymmetries in the distribution of roles in traditional classroom practices. However, this asymmetry is recontextualized in that B3 offers the other students a playful space where they can be serious without fully submitting to the order and authority of classroom discourse. It is worth noting that more than 40 percent of the talk is primarily oriented towards the text as a referential object. We could easily imagine a situation where antagonism against school would be expressed more explicitly or—perhaps even worse—through silence. In fact, the playful and parodical aspects of this group conversation seem to open up a dialogic space and also to unleash linguistic joy and creativity. The other students' resistance against B3 as a parodical author might represent a kind of critical awakening rather than a destructive conflict.

4. SUMMARY AND IMPLICATIONS

Laughter and playful looseness can have different forms and functions, and also different levels of depth. Group D5 illustrates a sense of pure yet superficial looseness.

suggests that the questions following the task support the official genre against parody, whereas our analysis indicates that questions like these are the very objects of parody.

Noisy off-task situations of this kind represent a well-known classroom challenge and are also often used as a model to understand a wide range of situations involving similar features that may threaten the teacher's control of the classroom. It might indeed be fair to say that the creative looseness in D5 is running wild. By contrast, Group A2 starts out as a staged—or somewhat scripted—dialogue, where the students seem to enter into familiar roles. They sound substantially engaged, but there is also a sense of procedural display (Nystrand, 1997, p. 17). A2 illustrates that student engagement is an ambiguous phenomenon which requires interpretation. The interpretive task involved is further complicated where the scripted order is challenged by what might be over-enthusiasm, followed by laughter and looseness. From one perspective, A2 can be interpreted as safely on task, as it has been seen to be in a previous study (Sønneland, 2018), but even so it deserves attention as a potential borderline case given the ambiguous display of engagements. Further, in Group A3 we found laughter associated with a more complex form of playful creativity where the entire dialogic space is suddenly subjected to joyful and creative play. This turn from serious to quasi-serious exploration is sparked by a witty misinterpretation. From this point onwards, the students are playing with and laughing at themselves as participants in the conversation as part of a disciplinary practice of the literature subject. What these groups have in common, however, is that double-voiced discourse is a source of creative play and joy.

Group D2 shares certain features with all the others but still stands out as the most interesting borderline case. It has the same subversive atmosphere as D5, the same use of conversational scripts as A2 and the same conscious play with disciplinary identity as A3—but all these features are ambiguous in D2's conversation. On first impression, the D2 students are systematically distancing themselves from the task. However, our analysis has shown that what they do actually opens up a dialogic space for creative talk about text. This might be an upside-down carnivalesque version of substantive engagement; at the very least, it is something different from procedural display. The conversation in D2 is not an ideal literary conversation; for example, two of the five participants have difficulty finding their place in it. Our main point is that this borderline case, which could easily have been dismissed as an instance of off-task students messing around, contains meaningful and creative responses to the educational practice of which those students are a part as well as to the task at hand.

Our four cases were characterized as located on the boundary between on-task and off-task engagement (Nystrand & Gamoran, 1991) in a study of student responses to a task calling for exploration of literary texts conceived of as open-ended problems (Sønneland, 2019b). Of the 18 conversations examined in that study, 16 were interpreted as sparked by substantive engagement. All students participated, with very few examples of rather silent students. The study was based on the hypothesis that subject-specific problems—in the L1 literature subject, the text as a problem—can generate substantive engagement and affinity. The findings of that study, carried out in ordinary lower-secondary classrooms, together with those from

studies making similar claims concerning upper-secondary school (Gourvenec, 2017) and primary school (Johansen, 2015), strongly suggest that open-ended tasks are indeed associated with substantive student engagement.

In the present study we have further tested that hypothesis by analysing what actually happens in borderline cases, where the open-ended task seemingly leads to chaos and noisy laughter. We have seen that all students are engaged in talk about text, in ways that are rarely possible in whole-class teaching. They use their language for exploratory purposes in a disciplinary context, and they are generally working on their understanding (cf. Barnes, 2008). Procedural engagement (Nystrand, 1997) implies that student attention is directed towards the pedagogical framework (cf. Bernstein, 1990) rather than towards the subject matter. Providing students with access to authentic problems in the subject—in our case, the text as a problem—is an ambition that calls for new approaches to framing activities at school and in individual subjects. From this perspective, it is interesting to consider the use of double-voiced discourse in our borderline cases in general, and in group D2 in particular, as entailing a further link in a chain of recontextualization (van Leeuwen, 2008): from the context of knowledge production into the school context (Bernstein, 1990), and further, in our cases, from the school context into a context of playful creativity that might support substantial engagement (Nystrand, 1997).

In fact, B3—more or less knowingly—creates a new dialogizing background for the conversation. As an ambiguous yet ambitious facilitator, he creates a dialogic space (Wegerif, 2013) in which the other students can be substantially engaged which is not determined by the teacher or by the school as an institution. This space resembles a Bakhtinian understanding of carnival as a temporary upside-down world (Bakhtin, 1984b) and as a particular worldview. This perspective might open our eyes to the depth and subtleties of student engagement. If we pursue the implications of this idea, we might also find productive alternative models for organizing the learning environment (Lensmire, 1994) or “third space” (Gutiérrez et al., 1999).

Risk is not necessarily a concept with positive connotations. Yet, it is an unavoidable part of the beauty of education (Biesta, 2013). It is true that the students in our borderline cases are not completely loyal to the task—we can sense that they are partly making fun of it. But the objects of the parodical impulses are rather the rules and rigid speech genres of school, not the task as such, and the students actually talk about the text in quite a substantive way through a frame of double-voiced discourse.

Our four borderline cases from a study of students’ engagement in problem-oriented literature education display some features often associated with laughter in the classroom. These features represent essential challenges relevant to the situational sensitivity of both teachers and researchers. Teachers must determine whether a given instance of laughter is friendly or hostile, and whether it is worthwhile to encourage or respond to joyful looseness and so risk losing control over the situation. Classroom researchers are usually at a safe distance from the situational heat of the chalkface, but they have an obligation under standards of research to

represent the classroom and classroom events as reliably as possible. Maintaining sensitivity to the many functions and forms of laughter is highly important as data reduction and analysis narrow down the perspective taken. In this context, our foregrounded group is an extreme and as such, an interesting case to consider. It is perfectly conceivable that researchers, while recognizing, for example, B3's active use of facilitation moves, which are clearly adopted from classroom practice, might still neglect the double-voiced aspect of B3's use of these moves. Dialogic discourse analysis (cf. Skaftun, 2019) is an approach that calls for an awareness of features such as these, and as is clear from the present article it also provides tools to interpret and describe them.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Brief summaries of the three background conversations

9D, Group 5: pure looseness

This group consists of two boys (Fred and Joe) and two girls (Anne and Betty). The overall initial impression is that these students are having fun, teasing each other and rejecting the task—and thus signalling a distance from the situation and the task at hand. A closer look reveals that there seems to be a lack of conversational frames and that a significant portion of the conversation is taken up by play with the sound recorder, banter and creative mispronunciation of words. The students have particular fun playing with the pronunciation of the name of one of the main characters—“Østein”. This name resembles a Norwegian word meaning “eye-apple” (as in “the apple of someone’s eye”). It is frequently mentioned throughout the conversation.

Whenever one of the boys (Fred) or either of the girls makes a suggestion about the interpretation of the text, they deliberately “over-pronounce” the second sound of that character’s name, making it come across like a pretend or theatrical name. Part of the reason for this focus on the name may be its somewhat unusual spelling (“Øystein” is more common). There are occasional instances of on-task seriousness, but they are repeatedly punctured by (intentional) mispronunciation accompanied by laughter. One possible interpretation of the object of parody is thus the perceived pretentiousness of the spelling variant. Following the lines of argument of carnivalesque features in the D2 conversation, Fred might be associated with the role of a fool or clown both before work begins and throughout the conversation, but at the same time he is focused on the task—particularly at the beginning of the conversation. As the session unfolds, two parallel conversations emerge in the group: the two girls talk about the text (more seriously than at the beginning) while the two boys increasingly seem to be fooling around in a sort of nonsense discourse, which is fuelled by the recorder, by the situation and by the two boys’ own laughter. However, these two parallel conversations are not entirely unconnected but occasionally merge; then all students seem to be on task. For instance, such a merger takes place right before the whole-class follow-up is going to start. To sum up, this conversation has a high energy level, and the laughter profoundly dominates it.

9A, Group 2: ambiguous engagement

There are three boys (Paul, Simon and Frank) and one girl (Mary) in this group. The conversation starts with a question put to the researcher “Are we just going to talk about the text?”, whereupon Mary is cheerfully singled out to take responsibility for her quality as “the only girl in the group” (as Frank puts it). Mary does indeed take on the voice of the teacher or the researcher when asking the others what they think the text is about. Simon announces that he accepts responsibility “if no one else will take it” and goes on to provide a summary of the plot, which receives the unanimous support of the other group members. Hence the students seem to immediately accept the situation and the task at hand—they participate in a way that can be characterized as substantive engagement. Even so, there is a faint idea of parodical distance, deriving partly from a sense of “staging”—the students seem to act as though they were on stage—and partly from the nature of the students’ disagreements about text interpretation. For example, during the first part of the conversation, suggestions about what may have happened to the baby, and about what the characters may have done to escalate the conflict depicted in the story, are followed by laughter. Then Simon is fascinated by one of his own suggestions about what happened to the baby—that the stove was of great significance in one way or another—and he advocates this with increasing emphasis. It is not clear whether he is being serious, or whether there is some element of pretence underpinning his position—and, if so, whether there is a parodical touch to his utterances. In fact, the object of the students’ laughter seems to be associated with the disciplinary practice (the interpretation of literary texts), which is twisted into a distorted image. Still, regardless of

whether he is sincere or only quasi-sincere, Simon's interpretations do fuel the conversation.

Like Simon, Paul also has an interpretive hang-up which may have a similar parodical touch. On several occasions he stresses a view that he claims to hold, namely that the baby was sexually abused. Towards the end of the conversation, several hypotheses are in the air and being played with, and the conversational space opens up to include the group at the next table. Now that the conversational space is open, the parody unfolds further. The repetition of the perverted interpretations makes the parody visible, and the boys' insistence makes it an object for the speaker's and the others' laughter. However, we are not certain whether or not Simon—the one who insists the most—is pretending to be enthusiastic and engaged or whether he is parodying, in particular as there are several indications to the effect that he is used to being the classroom clown (see above, about group D5). In this particular case, it seems, the clown is actually trying to keep the others' attention focused on the task.

In this conversation, the laughter is apparently implicit or tacit more than explicit. Its function is to carry the engagement, although it bursts into the open on some occasions. This kind of laughter seems to have a relationship with the one observed in the next group.

9A, Group 3: playful quasi-seriousness

This group, like the preceding one, seems to consist of individuals who are comfortable and at ease both socially and as participants, that is, learners, in this disciplinary activity. There are four students in this group, two girls (Jane and Emily) and two boys (George and Steve). Jane opens the conversation by offering an answer to the story's open ending: she says that she believes the baby died. Both George and Steve support Jane's interpretation, but Emily challenges it by asking a critical question about *how* the baby could have died. This critical question then pulls the conversation onwards. The students are thus on task immediately and show substantive engagement. However, about halfway into the talk, one of the girls (Emily) offers a playful suggestion with regard to the puzzle of the plot. "When he pulls back", she begins, with a reference to the text, but then she creates a new turn of events: "When he pulls back, then she comes closer", Emily says, and George seems to pick up on where Emily is going and asks, "and then they kiss?". To this, laughing loudly, Emily responds with "Yes!"—and from this moment the laughter is released. Hence the parody can be said to arise in a purely joyful moment. George, Jane, and Steve pick it up and go on talking in a parodical register, without any condescension towards Emily's interpretation. In fact, the entire group continues talking for a long time in a kind of quasi-conversation where they cultivate the art of over-interpretation while at the same time seeming to be actively and consciously aware that this is what they are doing. The laughter is here linked to the humorous effect of the quasi-disciplinary activity, meaning that the valuation mechanisms reflected in the conversation are, paradoxically, closely linked to disciplinary practices.

Appendix 2: Distribution of speech in the four groups

Transcriptions of the 18 conversations were imported into a shared project file in NVivo (NVivo for teams) and subjected to auto coding for speaker “cases” (i.e., individuals). NVivo generates overviews of the number of utterances, the number of words spoken and rates of “coverage” (based on the word count); these variables provide a fair indication of the distribution of speech time in a group as well as a useful first impression of the dynamics of a conversation. The Table 7 provides an overview of the speech distribution in all groups.

Table 7. Overview of the speech distribution in all groups

Class	Group	Time	Student cases*	Utterances	Words spoken	Words/ utterance	Coverage
9A	2	13:00 min	9AGR2-B1	43	343	8	11%
			9AGR2-B2	71	929	13	30%
			9AGR2-B3	70	928	13	30%
			9AGR2-G1	78	867	11	28%
9A	3	12:12	9AGR3-B1	75	892	12	32%
			9AGR3-B2	47	629	13	22%
			9AGR3-G1	44	446	10	16%
			9AGR3-G2	72	846	12	30%
9D	2	8:05 min	9DGR2-B1	17	98	6	6%
			9DGR2-B2	41	570	14	35%
			9DGR2-B3	42	419	10	26%
			9DGR2-B4	27	387	14	24%
			9DGR2-G1	14	145	10	9%
9D	5	9:35 min	9DGR5-B1	56	550	9,8	22%
			9DGR5-B2	53	528	10	21%
			9DGR5-G1	73	733	10	29%
			9DGR5-G2	71	713	10	28%

* Student cases are coded for [Year-Class-Group] and further as B(oy)s or G(irl)s 1–4.

Appendix 3: Transcription of the conversation in the foregrounded case (9D, group 2), in English translation

9D, group 2: Transcription

- 1) B1: B4—is there something you would like to say to them? (.)
- 2) B2: (leaning into the camera) What’s this?
- 3) B3: OK, so we’ve read “Run for your life”, and now B4 will tell us what it’s about—right, B4?
- 4) B1: [first...]
- 5) B2: Yes—or. What was it. Well, did you get what you were reading?
- 6) B1: No.
- 7) G1: No.
- 8) B3: Yes of course [but B4 is the one who should begin]
- 9) G1: No. I think it was a bit unclear.
- 10) B1: (?)
- 11) G1: They started talking about someone called Øistein and then a plane ticket, and then suddenly a jacket, so it was a bit like (.) CONFUSING¹³.
- 12) B3: [that was hard VIOLENCE to B4]
- 13) B2: Well, I just read, well I read the first sentence and then I was just like; OK. And then I read the next sentence and I didn’t understand shit, I fell off the whole thing.
- 14) G1: [Yeah]
- 15) B3: I’m dyslexic. I ehm. (.)
- 16) B4: Øistein’s the buddy of this I-person. And this DUDE is talking (about/with?) the father.
- 17) B2: Yeah, and one of them doesn’t have a father. And then he was going to a sports team or something like that.
- 18) B4: And then he started crying.
- 19) B2: Yeah. (.) ehm (.) And he’d grown older. I think.
- 20) B3: Yes, and so?
- 21) B2: I think he forgot his jacket.
- 22) B3: The father was the one who forgot his jacket. Or something.
- 23) B2: How do you know he didn’t forget his jacket? (.)
- 24) B4: ALRIGHT, ALRIGHT, BASICALLY they were supposed to run back home to get his SHIT—his things—because he’d left everything in the pocket of his jacket. Then he’d taken the wrong jacket and because of that they had to, no they didn’t have the time to run back home, and then they didn’t get on=
- 25) B3: And then they forgot something or other.
- 26) B2: (reading aloud by himself and laughing) WE TRIPPED. We tripped. (.) Hey, you, they didn’t just forget the jacket, they forgot the whole shit, right.
- 27) B4: Yeah.
- 28) B2: They forgot the shit.
- 29) B4: Plane ticket and passport and wallet.
- 30) B3: Yes, and then... Does anyone think they understand what this text is about?
- 31) B4: Yes, almost.
- 32) B2: It looks a bit like eh=
- 33) B3: =What is your view on this text, MISTER (B2’s last name)?
- 34) B2: Well, uh, I think that, uh, that this guy, the father, is like the coach or something, and that they were going to Singapore to take part in some kind of sport,—running or something. (.) Olympic Games SHIT, I dunno. Some sort of race thing, anyway.

¹³ The students use some English words and phrases. These are marked with SMALL CAPS in the transcription.

- 35) B3: Yes yes yes.
 36) B2: And then they'd forgotten all their things, so they weren't allowed to go.
 37) B3: [mhm] yes.
 38) B4: Who's the sailor? Is he just a random dude on the bus or something?
 39) B3: [they eh]
 40) B2: The sailor white¹⁴. Eh who cares. Santa Claus, maybe. (.)
 41) B3: ehm (.) So, do you interpret [sic!] anything interesting about this text, and why is it so hard to understand?
 42) B4: It's all a mess (.)
 43) B3: B1?
 44) B4: Stop kidding, this is serious =
 45) B3: = Do you interpret [sic!] anything interesting about this text?
 46) B2: No.
 47) B3: OK. Why is it so difficult to understand?
 48) B2: Well, I don't know, but that's why it isn't very interesting, I didn't understand anything.
 49) B1: Maybe you can answer that, B3?
 50) B3: Eh, I'm asking the questions here. I don't need to, I don't need to answer that (.)
 51) B4: Yeah, but you = (?)
 52) B3: ah-ah-ah
 53) B2: [Maybe you have to]
 54) B3: OK. My point of view?
 55) B4: Yeah, from a dyslexic guy (to get an idea?)
 56) B3: From a dyslexic guy I'd like to say that B4 should get a grip and start talking about what he has read.
 57) B4: Yeah OK (.). Yeah OK. This guy Øistein and his friend had to go back to their house to pick up the jacket that this father guy had forgotten, wallets and plane tickets and all that kind of SHIT in it =
 58) B2: = How's it possible to forget plane tickets when you're on your way to the plane, anyway?
 59) B4: I don't know, he pulls it off, he doesn't pull it off=
 60) B2: =And wallets! That'd be the first thing you'd think about bringing along?
 61) G1: Yeah, OK (GUYS?), I forgot it once (?)
 62) B4: [Yeah, whatever, that's what he pulled off in the text, and that's just the way it is]
 63) B2: It is a bit funny, though.
 64) B3: Who's the sailor?
 65) B4: And then he had two jackets and he brought one of them, and then it wasn't the right one after all. And so they went down there [to the bus stop] anyway, for some **strange** reason, even if they couldn't even take the bus anymore. So they went down there anyway, for no reason, and then, well, this father guy was going to Singapore. And then Øistein and the other guy got a compliment because they had run so insanely fast. And all that. AND then this I-person started crying because he doesn't have a father.
 66) G1: [I've been there]
 67) B2: [You've lived there, haven't you?]
 68) B2: Nothing's permitted in Singapore, you know. (.) It's not even permitted to chew gum.
 69) G1: No.
 70) B2: It's totally sick.
 71) G1: Yeah.
 72) B4: And the sailor's (.) a Russian spy.

¹⁴ This is a partial quote from the text, of a verbless clause which reads "the sailor white like the ocean" in full.

- 73) B2: How do you know he's Russian?
 74) B3: Of course! He's a sailor!
 75) B4: [He's a sailor] (.)
 76) B2: Hey you, I pictured (?) (.)
 77) B3: Well, then, did you guys feel this was an interesting text?
 78) B4: No.
 79) B2: No I didn't find it interesting. (.) I never understood what, what it was about. So it wasn't interesting at all.
 80) B3: Judging from=
 81) G1: No it's not interesting if you don't know at all what it's about, so
 82) B2: [exactly]
 83) B3: Judging from B4's comment, I would say it's pretty STRAIGHTFORWARD what happens in the text.
 84) B2: B3—you didn't read it, did you?
 85) B3: Yes, I tried.
 86) B2: Is that why you're not answering anything? (3s)
 87) B3: Eh, but it was an interesting task. (everyone laughs) (5s)
 88) B1: YEAH RIGHT, B3.
 89) B2: You know we're not graded on this, don't you?
 90) B3: Yes, I know. But (?) (.) So, B1, what was your favourite part of this thing?
 91) B1: Maybe when they're running.
 92) B2: When they're running?
 93) B3: Now he definitely didn't read it.
 94) B1: I did, I read that they were running.
 95) B4: No the best part was when he started crying
 96) B2: Oh yes, when he started crying. Then he said he had no father. So then he said, [quoting from the short story] "I have no father, I said. But you're Øistein's friend, he said. You ran with him." Argh what does that mean?
 97) B1: [Yes that was (fun?)]
 98) G1: [What, see, that has nothing to say] What does that have to do with anything? Øistein's friend, what does that have to do with the father?
 99) B1: I think the problem is the author.
 100) B2: [I'M YOUR FATHER]
 101) B3: I don't get it.
 102) B2: He must have been like HIGH when he (laughs). Sitting there with, like, two grams in the BLUNT and just sitting there and, writing it down. And here we are talking about it. (3s)
 103) B4: So, G1, what does it feel like to be the only girl in this group? Except for B1.
 104) B3: We do have B1
 105) (everybody laughs)
 106) B1: Me?
 107) B4: Yes.
 108) B1: Dammit, I'm as much of a boy as B4 anyway.
 109) B2: B4's not a boy, he's a man (6s)
 110) B3: Eh, G1. I don't think you answered B4's question.
 111) G1: Well that, it's fine. That's the way it is sometimes (3s)
 112) B1: What?
 113) G1: That I'm the only girl in the group.
 114) B3: So, B1, what was the best part of this text?
 115) B1: I told you—when he was running.
 116) B4: How many times have you asked that anyway?
 117) B3: I don't care.
 118) B2: B3, what did you think was the best thing about the text?

- 119) B3: When he puked.
 120) B2: Did he puke too?
 121) B3: Yes.
 122) B2: I didn't catch that.
 123) B3: No me neither (.) It's the secret part of the text.
 124) B4: You guys have to read it (?)
 125) B3: Yes it says here; it's the sailor really.
 126) B4: puke
 127) B3: puke (4s)
 128) B1: (?) (6s)
 129) B2: I thought she said she wouldn't have a camera.
 130) B3: Wasn't it, it was B1 who took it anyhow.
 131) B1: (?)
 132) G1: Yes.
 133) B2: So, what was=
 134) B3: =Would you've liked to see a part two of this text?
 135) B2: No, not really.
 136) (everybody): No
 137) B4: Yes we must find out if he catches the plane.
 138) B2: [What didn't] What **didn't** you get, what did you get the least in the text?
 139) B4: The sailor.
 140) B1: The entire text.
 141) G1: The entire text. The entire text was unclear.
 142) B2: Yes like most of it. Where did you like fall off?
 143) B3: [What's a sailor doing on a bus?] To the airport? (.)
 144) B4: He's going fishing in Singapore.

Appendix 4: What the students talk about—words coded

	B1	B2	B3	B4	G1	SUM	%
1 : Facilitation	23	6	285	17	0	331	20%
2 : The text	22	258	74	288	70	712	43%
3 : Associations	0	93	6	13	22	134	8%
4 : Comprehension	3	69	16	4	12	104	6%
5 : Social situation	27	57	76	21	27	208	13%
6 : Evaluation	21	48	50	24	20	163	10%
TOTAL	96	531	507	367	151	1652	100%

Appendix 5: Transcription key

The transcripts are performed with the degree of detail that seems necessary to make an analysis that is reliable - in the sense that the transcript works with other elements of the analysis - such as the interpretation of engagement in the

conversations as a whole (cf. Gee, 2014, p. 136). The purpose of the transcript is to gain access to data that can provide information about the students' orientation towards the text, the task, the situation and to each other. We are interested in various nuances in students' utterances in the conversations; subtle offsets, signals of distance, underlining, interruptions and overlaps. The following characters and parenthesis of information are used in the transcripts:

- [] overlap, two or more students talk simultaneously
- = no pause between utterances
- (?) unidentified word(s)
- (know) best guess
- (.) pause under 2 seconds
- (4s) time of pause
- Bold** stressing/underlining of words spoken

In addition, we have been using parenthesis on information that promote the interpretation of students' orientation towards the situation, each other's utterances, the text and the task. For instance: (moving and touching the recorder), (gasping), (laughs), (giggles), (yawns), (coughs), (intonates), (rising of intonation—possible sign of distancing?).