

# CONVERSATIONS ABOUT LITERARY CONVERSATIONS

An inquiring assemblage

JOHN GORDON<sup>1</sup>, DENA EDEN<sup>2</sup>, ERIN GIRLING<sup>3</sup>,  
AND CAROLINE RICHARDS<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>University of East Anglia; <sup>2</sup>Unity Schools Partnership; <sup>3</sup>Inspiration Trust

‘Assemblages are ad hoc groupings of diverse elements,  
of vibrant materials of all sorts’

Massumi, 2002, p. xxi

## Abstract

This article represents conversations about L1 literary conversations. It is an assemblage of discussion, literary quotation, transcriptions of classroom dialogue, and our reflections on making audio recordings of lessons to review L1 teaching. We adopt an unconventional article format intended to reflect qualities of L1 literary conversations, which may be provisional, layered, recursive and open-ended. They allow for different perspectives and, as intertextual links in a Bakhtinian chain of literary expression and exchange, never really end. They are embodied in materialities of shifting ratio, tilting to print or the spatial arrangement of a page, then to speech and sound. They span time and occur through multiple voices, some belonging to teachers and students, others participating through literary constructs such as ‘narrator’ or ‘character’. We present a posthumanist account of how we recorded literary conversations, conveying our methods and considering the extent to which MP3 audio files helped us understand the voices comprising L1 literary pedagogies. We work in a space between research and professional development, declining social science conventions which inform many education research publications. We attempt an aesthetic that complements the distinctive modes of knowing and learning through literature (an epistemological orientation) conveying the unique nature of collaborative enquiry about L1 literary pedagogies (an ontological orientation).

Keywords: L1 literary conversations, audio, Pedagogic Literary Narration, post-humanism, assemblage

## 1

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Corresponding author: John Gordon, School of Education and Lifelong Learning, Lawrence Stenhouse Building, University of East Anglia, University Plain, Norwich, Norfolk, NR4 7TJ, United Kingdom. Email: [john.gordon@uea.ac.uk](mailto:john.gordon@uea.ac.uk)

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### 1. MARKING OUT OUR CONSTRUCTION ZONE

As you read this article, think of a traffic cone. The sort of traffic cones we find across our roads or footpaths go by many different names, including construction cones, safety cones, channelizing devices, even—colloquially—witches' hats. The functions and properties suggested by those synonyms also signal some of the themes of this article. We variously and respectively explore teachers' professional development around the 'construction zone' (Newman et al., 1989) of literary conversations in L1 classrooms; classroom dynamics where students feel secure and at ease; the trajectories of literary conversations in relation to teacher exposition; and finally, the ineffable and alchemical moments of delight that literary study can create for students and teachers. We adopt an experimental form to present these themes, which intersperses relatively conventional research discourse describing our activities with the voices of teachers and texts comprising our study, usually indicated by use of italics:

*Robert: Listening to audio recordings was an opportunity for professional development and personal reflection in a safe place, such as in the car on the way home after a lesson.*

In this respect, you might interpret the bright orange traffic cone as directing or warning: the form of this article is unconventional. We hope the structure of the article allows us to articulate something about how we know and do when we connect education research and practice to support literary conversations in schools and L1 classrooms. Our writing attempts to reflect distinctive ways of knowing and learning through literature (its epistemic traits), and to convey experiences of teaching and teacher development for collective reading in L1 classrooms. In this respect, our article attempts to reflect in its form both experiences of teaching literary study and ways of being as teachers of literature, tending towards an expression of the ontology of L1 teaching using literature to convey what sets it apart from teaching in other disciplines. It attempts to find a new mode of expression suited to educational research in language arts pedagogy, where typically scientific orientations to research cannot suffice because the object of research concerns ways of knowing through literary art and aesthetic experience.

The traffic cone is important for another reason. Digitally recorded MP3 sound files are represented by the traffic cone icon when they are listed in your file explorer or opened in the media player application VLC ('VideoLAN client') on your device.

*Robert: I recorded many lessons on my iPhone and discovered...*

Sound files were one resource for our activities, giving us access to teachers' voices recorded during teaching. They helped us attend to the materiality of teachers' voices in terms of tone, pitch and volume as well as the words uttered. In this respect, the sound files were construction cones marking out our workspaces and influencing our thoughts and actions. Like traffic cones in the road, they can show us that incidents have occurred and that we must be alert. Each sound file generated in

our work captured some of a ‘poetic event’ (Rosenblatt, 1978) in L1 literary study, often directing our attention to fragments of literary texts entering into literary conversation. They helped us to think about how literary conversations are, how phrases from study texts permeate them, our place in them, and what they might also be. We developed an attentiveness to sound and pattern, and like the character of Fagin described in the novel *Oliver Twist*, which was studied by classes in our project, we

*would stop every now and then to listen  
when there was the least noise below*

We use the phrases ‘how literary conversations are’ and ‘our place in them’ deliberately, though tentatively, gesturing to posthumanist orientations to pedagogy and pedagogical research (Taylor & Hughes, 2018; Ulmer, 2018). These plural orientations tend to look beyond human participants to explore relationships between human and non-human things. They de-centre the human and urge movement away from binary oppositions such as Nature/Culture. In our interest in the materiality of literary conversations, we can *gesture* to posthuman orientations, though we must also recognise the limitations of such an investigation, if we acknowledge the activity of literary study as a manifestation of humanist education in the liberal arts (Strube, 2021). Nevertheless, it remains possible to de-centre the human participants in literary study—the teacher, or individual students—and instead to view instances of literary study as collective, spatial, temporal and material poetic events. We may also decentre the literary texts used in literary study, extending reader-response approaches to consider the shifting materiality of literary study texts in the classroom, which at the very least usually moves between the silent word on the page, perhaps presented using a Visualiser or in a quotation on a PowerPoint slide, to utterance in reading aloud or through quotation embedded in teacher exposition or whole-class discussion. In considering the pedagogic function of these shifts in materiality, we are ‘getting at the materialities of information’ (Donna Haraway, describing the work of Kate Hayles, 1999 in Gane, 2006) in literary education and pedagogy, in an attempt to understand how the potential of audio clips—which present semantic, intonational, sequential, patterned and multivocal information in the materiality of sound—in the developing practice of teachers of literature.

*Robert: I heard myself sometimes interrupting or moving on before a student had had time to compose and deliver their thoughts. This informed a shift in approach (or at least an attempt at one), with an emphasis on ensuring there was thinking time for the students and a focus on explaining what the class is doing clearly and explicitly.*

We chose to begin our article by invoking the traffic cone icon because it is both a digital, virtual non-human thing, and because the zeros and ones of digital information in its linked sound files represent the ephemeral utterances that

happened in a material space, at a given time, in the air shared by students and teacher, reading from one novel or another.

The cone represents the intersection of teachers, technology and the materiality of literary conversations in L1 classrooms. Audio files of classroom exposition and discussions became nodes for own conversations about literary study pedagogy, and the recordings they carried were actors in our dialogue.

Our collaboration aimed to explore how some of the education research approaches devised by one member of our team (Gordon, 2020), might be adopted and interpreted by other colleagues in their teaching. Around this, we problematise the binary assumptions inherent in notions about translating research to practice and research impact and recognise tensions between our activities and the form in which we articulate them, and the rationalist, empirical and humanist assumptions of policy and curriculum frames for our work. These tensions have been acknowledged by others adopting assemblage approaches or diffractive methodologies, who feel that calls for research to apply to practice and policy, and to be evidence-based, are not easily reconciled with questions about ‘the capacity of social inquiry to accurately ‘represent’ or ‘reflect’ the social world it studies’ raised by sociologists taking post-structuralist, feminist or materialist approaches (see Fox & Alldred, 2021, for a full discussion of these challenges). Further, we argue that these tensions have a further and nuanced dimension in education research relating to literary study, where the objects of research—teaching and learning related to literature—in themselves represent modes of knowing through encounters with verbal art, where materiality within texts and across encounters with texts are essential to their pedagogic potential. We suggest that confidently scientific and empirical modes of research and research representation are unlikely to adequately reflect or explain literary study in education or articulate its diffracted and liminal effects.

*a mortal knows just enough of what his mind is doing,  
to form some glimmering conception of its mighty powers,  
its bounding from earth and spurning time and space, when freed*

*from Oliver Twist*

Some of these tensions also relate to the form of the literary novel itself as the object of the literary conversations we considered, and to the transformations of literary texts in print to literary texts in utterance, to speech and sound, through teaching.

We feel it is consistent with the orientations of post-humanism to resist calling the activities represented in this article research, or professional development, though we proceeded in what we recognise retrospectively as ‘edu-craft intervention, as a matter of knowing-in-doing’ (Taylor, 2018, p. 21), a collaboration of experiment, invention and creation ‘with what is (already) at hand and by bringing that which might (or might not) be useful, because you don’t yet know, into the orbit of research’ (p. 18). Taylor traces her coining of the term ‘edu-craft’ to a collaborative investigation she joined with undergraduate students, exploring how their

curriculum was ‘brought into being and enacted through a mutable range of posthuman materialities and spatialities’ (p. 20). For Taylor, attending to that ‘mutable range’ involved sensitivity to non-human resources which lent texture to the seminar room space, including ‘noise, atmosphere and light’. The responses of Taylor and her students found expression in journalling, photos, poems and objects, while their analysis drew on sociology, organization studies and material culture studies as well as traditions of education research. In characterising our own work, we are drawn to the ‘edu-craft’ term presented by Taylor because it conveys a quality of our collaborative working where the distinction between ‘teacher’ and ‘researcher’ was blurred. The term also captures our ‘emergent workings out of the affective, material and spatial happenings’ of literary conversations in our classrooms (p. 21) which were similarly provisional and experimental, arising from a collective process of sharing audio clips of classroom exchanges and directing our attention to details of recordings nominated as salient by members of our group. This nomination was usually made by the colleague who shared a recording of their own teaching, with other colleagues responding or foregrounding further details. Taylor links her use of the term ‘edu-craft’ to phrases like ‘fielding of the event’ (Manning & Massumi, 2014, p. 14), ‘commotion of co-activity’ (p. 14) and *détournement* (Debord, 1955), tracing it to the theories of Karen Barad and quoting Barad’s assertion that ‘bodies do not simply take their place in the world...rather “environments” and “bodies” are intra-actively constructed’ (Barad, 2007, p. 170). The environment for our L1 edu-craft inquiry comprised books for teaching, hand-held voice recorders, the files of sounds we made and the things we said during teaching, notes we sketched, transcriptions we generated, conversations we had, and the time we spent together and separately—all of them relating to the ‘intra-actively constructed’ events of literary conversation in L1 classrooms.

*It was enlightening to hear other teachers in recordings delivering single word or phrase analysis, which I’ll definitely use in my teaching—to introduce ‘speculate’, tentative language, and an approach to teaching the word ‘garnish’!*

When we say ‘we’, we mean the named co-authors of the article, each having a part in the creation or exploration of the sound files of literary conversation, and of their potential uses in professional development activities. We are L1 specialists working at two different secondary schools in the same academy trust (Catherine, Erin, Robert and Dena), and at the regional university (John). We work in the area of England known as East Anglia.

## 2. CONSTRUCTION

### 2.1 *Ahead of our first exploratory meeting – 1 November 2022, email from John to colleagues*

Please look at the two PDF documents provided—each presenting a transcript of real classroom exchanges. It suffices to skim read each ahead of our meeting, but *The Ghost of Thomas Kempe* [an extract from this novel and a related transcript of classroom conversation about it] merits close reading ahead of the session if you have time.

I will explain the *Jekyll* transcripts more fully, but have a glance at the formatting of the transcripts there before we meet. A loose agenda for our meeting:

- Aims and contexts for our collaboration
- Developing ‘Pedagogic Literary Narration’ for teaching, including attention to transcripts A and B
- Identifying features of reading/audiobook use in teaching which interest us
- Practicalities: ethics and recording protocol

### 2.2 *Assemblage and literary conversations*

In our collaboration we sought a path away from ‘educational triage’ (Gillborn & Youdell, 2000, p. 134), a characterisation of teaching development as a performance driven fix. Instead, we aimed at an agentic (Priestley, et al., 2013), dialogic (Charteris & Smardon, 2015) and open-ended form of practitioner inquiry (Smardon & Charteris, 2012). The object, process and expression of our activities are not easily separated and may be considered in their entirety as a research-assemblage. Fox and Alldred (2018) define a research-assemblage as ‘the multiplicity of affective relations in the research process, including the ‘events’ to be researched’, which may comprise research tools (e.g., questionnaires or interviews), technologies for research (software and hardware), theoretical frameworks and research literature, researchers themselves, data generated through the adopted approach to research, sites for research, ethical principles, cultures of research, research outputs and their audiences, and researchers themselves. We articulate the elements of the research-assemblage for our activity and this article’s expression of it in Figure 1.

*Figure 1. An inquiring assemblage for literary conversations*

<i>Events</i>	An experiment in research-informed continuing professional development; literary conversations in L1 classrooms; making recordings of literary conversations in L1 classrooms; individual participants reflecting on recordings, including journal reflections; all participants reflecting on recordings together; recorded conversations between John and other participants.
<i>Participants</i>	Dena, an English subject leader across the group of schools represented by teachers Catherine, Erin and Robert. John, a researcher and teacher educator at the regional university.
<i>Sites for research</i>	L1 classrooms in the schools represented by Catherine, Erin and Robert; the professional development centre for the group of schools; virtual discussion spaces.
<i>Research tools and technologies for research</i>	Digital voice recorders; WAV files; Microsoft Teams.
<i>Theoretical frameworks</i>	Research approach developed by one of our team - Pedagogic Literary Narration (PLN); posthumanism; materialism; the discipline of L1 literary study; reader-response theory (Louise Rosenblatt).
<i>Research literature</i>	The literature cited in this article.
<i>Data</i>	Verbal data in written and spoken modes: the literary texts (including quotations drawn from them) used in the lessons recorded by participants; conversational and teacher exposition data recorded in participants' lessons; transcripts of classroom conversation and exposition annotated using PLN annotation; participant journals, notes and resources.
<i>Ethical principles</i>	Activities adhered to school and university protocols; the commitment of participants to collaboration and shared expression of the activities.
<i>Research cultures</i>	A meeting of school research culture with university research culture, and with international research culture represented by this journal; their intersection with the culture of L1 literary study.
<i>Research outputs</i>	WAV audio files; participant journals; transcripts; this article as an attempt to express the assemblage.
<i>Research audiences</i>	Teachers of L1 literary study; teachers and leaders in the participating schools; the readership of this journal.

In presenting this article, we find playful and allusive forms of expression appealing, to convey the assemblage as a set of relations that encompass literary-textual data and additional verbal utterances that embed fragments of literary texts. These forms seem well suited to conveying the intra-activity (Barad, 2007) that we joined and sustained in our inquiry, and to the intra-activity that we consider to be inherent in literary study as it happens in classrooms. They also complement the theorised account of literary pedagogy, devised by one of our team and described in the next section of this article, which outlines the pedagogically focussed narrative work of L1 teachers as they organise the resources and many voices in their classrooms to create rich experiences of literature for students. By presenting many voices in this article, including the voices of texts, we can gently invoke posthumanist concepts which may not have been intended by their authors to apply to teaching and learning in classrooms,

*and yet the self-same senses were mentally engaged,  
at the same time,  
in busy action with almost everybody*

[Oliver Twist]

but which resonate with our own experiences of being teachers of literature, and of sharing literature and ‘poetic events’ (Rosenblatt, 1978) of reading with students. Intra-activity has been viewed as a process where ‘discourse and matter are understood to be mutually constituted in the production of knowing’ (Lenz Taguchi, 2012, p. 268). From that perspective, we can recognise the materiality of books held by teachers and students during lessons, their pages turned - often in synchrony – in a communal space,

*doing,  
to form some glimmering conception*

[Oliver Twist]

and we can view the narratives they hold in print as materiality which is distinct from the materiality they obtain when read aloud, not only by teachers but also in the intra-activity of students also reading aloud and across turns in the classroom. In our activities, the literary texts which are part of L1 conversations are actors in the classroom just as much as the audio recordings we made of those conversations are actors in our collaborative inquiry: ‘any thing that does modify a state of affairs by making a difference is an actor’ (Latour, 2005, p. 71). We approach teaching and learning in literary study as heterogeneous and entangled phenomena involving ‘students, teachers, learning activities and spaces, knowledge representations such as texts, pedagogy, curriculum content, and so forth’ (Fenwick, et al., 2011, pp. 3–4). Emphasis or change in one element can be significant to the literary study experience, for students engaging with literature with their peers and for teachers reflecting with their colleagues about literary reading in their classrooms. For us, at their best, literary conversations are events where ‘expression is abroad in the world—here the potential is for what may become’ (Massumi, 2002, p. xxi): that is what makes them educative.

The practice of literary study, and instances of literary study in action—of any text at any time—are themselves examples of assemblage, ‘a mobile distribution of interrelated phenomena, each of which maintains these features of multiplicity’ (Beighton, 2013, p. 1296). We take the stance that literary study cannot exist as ‘reality or form outside the enactment of those relations’ (Law 2008, p. 141) and adopt a form for this article which attempts to capture some of these relations. We intend this article as an agentic assemblage (Bennett, 2010) which presents the ‘discursive artifacts’ (Mazzei & Jackson, 2016) of literary study, and of developing teaching for literary study, as ‘always already material and the material as an always already discursive construction’ (p. 1). The different sections of the article give voice to different members of our team, or to the voices of texts that they have used or created and seek to convey some of the ‘agential cuts’ (Barad, 2007, p. 185) each of us have made during this activity. By making these cuts, we establish an orientation or point of view—and in each of these moments we make provisional evaluations of

our teaching, relative to the utterances of others and to heterogenous experiences of teaching literature (even of the same text)—though we have all done so in a loose frame of activity using a voice recorder, and with the common purpose to reflect on what we notice, and how we develop as teachers, when we consider brief audio clips of our teaching.

Research around and about literary study deserves methods ‘capable of engaging the materiality of language itself – its material force and its entanglements in bodies and matter’ (MacLure, 2013, p. 658). The assemblage we offer—we hope—is ‘innovative and productive... to produce a new reality, by making numerous, often unexpected, connections’ (Livesey, 2010, p. 19) around and through literary conversations, for expressing how teachers of literature *do* teaching literature and how they reflect on their work.

### 2.3 *About pedagogic literary narration*

John had already published accounts of empirical research considering L1 literature conversations in primary, secondary and higher education, as well as conversations about books in informal reading groups (Gordon, 2019, 2022). He had started to develop theorisation of L1 literature conversations for practice:

Actions bringing literary texts into speech for public attention are never neutral: they always have ontological and epistemological freight. This study provides analytic resources and a theoretical framework for investigating how those actions operate, and illustrates their practical application for research and teacher education.

Gordon, 2020, p. 213

John focussed on L1 literature conversations where literary texts are ‘the object of instruction, oriented to as crafted aesthetic artefacts’, when there is ‘a reflexive relationship between pedagogy, interaction and text(s)’ and when what learners say, and how they say it, are evaluated by teachers - in the moment of teaching—to determine their next actions in L1 literature teaching (Gordon, 2020, p. 199).

Specifically, John described a form of teaching with literary texts which he called Pedagogic Literary Narration (PLN). PLN by teachers shapes collective interactions for literary reading and learning, combining ‘the unfolding experience of reading a narrative together with analytic orientation to a shared text’ (Gordon, 2020, p. 200). When teachers do PLN, they use various verbal and paralinguistic resources which influence and direct students’ reading attention for differing purposes and effects. John aimed to describe and represent the usually spontaneous ways in which teachers present and respond to the text they are reading—often aloud, verbatim—and respond to the students reading, reading aloud and listening with them. The long tradition of discourse analysis in applied linguistics research in education has usually viewed teacher turns in conversation as functioning either to initiate then evaluate or feedback on student contributions (see discussions of initiate-response-evaluate triads and initiate-respond-feedback triads in classroom discourse: Hall, 1998;

Mehan, 1979; Sinclair & Coulthard, 1975; Wells, 1993), though John proposed other functions of teacher turns in L1 literary conversations which emerge uniquely in relationships between the L1 text being presented, the teacher's speech, and students' unfolding experience of the literary story shared in the classroom:

When used skilfully by teachers, it [PLN] serves to illuminate the focal text's narrative for students during the collective and public experience of reading the novel. Heteroglot teacher exposition has the capacity to enhance students' narrative experience, supporting comprehension and encouraging involvement.

Gordon, 2021, p. 200

John arrived at his account of PLN after making audio recordings of L1 literary conversations in schools, universities and reading groups. He listened to the sound files representing those conversations and analysed them by adapting conversation analysis (Heritage, 1995; Hutchby & Wooffitt, 1998; Seedhouse, 2004) and combining it with forms of narrative analysis (Gee, 1985, 1986, 1991; Riessman, 1993). Through inductive consideration of audio data, John developed terminology and tools to describe the pedagogic actions of teachers in their exposition and in relation to their students and what their students said. These included resources for looking at how teachers use paralinguistic and prosodic resources to emphasise or distinguish features of texts, and in particular for examining the pedagogic function of spoken quotations in L1 literature conversations, where utterances in the classroom become heteroglot (Bakhtin, 1981, 1986) and intertextual (Fairclough, 1992; Kristeva, 1980; see Gordon, 2022 for discussion of intertextuality in PLN). John also considered the intertextual play of different stories introduced to discussion of texts which may paraphrase and recast episodes of a study text, or narrate related personal experiences or experiences of reading (see 'small stories', Bamberg & Georgakopoulou, 2008). Participants in L1 conversation use these stories to position themselves relative to the narrative text under discussion, or to orient the reading positions of others. These stories, and their management in talk by teachers, are powerful pedagogic resources.

The collaboration we describe in this article sought to consider the potential and feasibility of making audio recordings to develop teaching for L1 literary conversations. We understood from the outset that using the approach in practice, around the daily experience of teaching, was likely to be quite different from John's experience and version of the approach in research, and that colleagues would adapt or emphasise aspects of PLN for their immediate priorities and interests. We also wanted to consider what adopting the approach entailed for individual teachers, and what it involved in terms of organisation across schools in the academy trust.

#### *2.4 Dena, reflecting on the collaboration, March 2023*

When it comes to L1 teaching, we all know that there seem to be some teachers that have something about them when they're delivering, particularly literature teaching,

that seems to get more out of the students in terms of conversation and discussion around the text.

I thought that PLN was a really interesting way to think about it. Is it the way that the texts are read to students? Is it the conversation that the teacher puts in themselves, rather than what questions they ask? It's more about when they ask the students and how they ask them, and I thought that was really interesting - how PLN kind of addresses that directly and starts to unpick what those really good teachers do.

I thought it was excellent for some of my colleagues in schools to have that space to look at their own practice and to reflect and say, "Well, I know I do this well, but actually *why* do I?", and then equally on the other side, "Students never seem to really get what I'm saying when I'm asking questions, when I'm reading, so why not? Where am I doing it wrong or what do I need to improve? - I don't know." Maybe it's the granular detail of it that often we don't have time to explore. So, it just seemed like a really nice opportunity to do that.

### 3. ALCHEMY

*Jane Eyre* by Charlotte Brontë: the opening of Chapter Six

The next day commenced as before, getting up and dressing by rushlight; but this morning we were obliged to dispense with the ceremony of washing; the water in the pitchers was frozen.

A change had taken place in the weather the preceding evening, and a keen north-east wind, whistling through the crevices of our bedroom windows all night long, had made us shiver in our beds, and turned the contents of the ewers to ice.

Before the long hour and a half of prayers and Bible-reading was over, I felt ready to perish with cold. Breakfast-time came at last, and this morning the porridge was not burnt; the quality was eatable, the quantity small. How small my portion seemed! I wished it had been doubled.

In the course of the day I was enrolled a member of the fourth class, and regular tasks and occupations were assigned me: hitherto, I had only been a spectator of the proceedings at Lowood; I was now to become an actor therein.

#### 3.1 Pedagogic literary narration of *Jane Eyre*: Catherine orchestrates PLN

This section of our article focuses on literary conversation around the excerpt of *Jane Eyre* quoted above. Catherine recorded a conversation in her lesson with students aged 13–14. The eight-minute recording captures part of the lesson where Catherine invited her students to compare the characters of the young protagonist, Jane, and her peer at the school, Helen. In the recording, Catherine also invited her students to identify some of the 'negative things' about the experience that Jane and other students of Lowood school have of their first day at the school. Catherine then directed her students to their copies of the novel, nominating a student to read the

extract presented above. Teachers' orchestration of resources and activities in this way, to achieve a shared reading relative to learning objectives, demonstrates PLN in action.

Our collaborative process sought to identify practical applications of using the recordings for teacher development within the daily experience of practice. The consent of parents/carers and students is routinely sought by the academy trust to make audio and video recordings that support teachers' professional work, though the parts of the transcript which include student turns in the conversation are not shown in this example. We focus first on teacher exposition, so this transcript represents only the parts of the recording where Catherine speaks. In this study, the transcript marks selected prosodic features of Catherine's speech, using and simplifying the conversation analytic orientation John adopted in earlier work (Gordon, 2019; 2022). Double-underlining represents emphasis by the speaker, italics show rising intonation, underlining shows falling intonation, and text between arrows (>...<) shows words uttered at a pace notably greater than surrounding speech. Numbers in brackets indicate pauses in seconds or fractions of a second. Words and phrases quoted aloud from the pages of *Jane Eyre* are marked at their onset by a single section sign (§), and at their closure by a double section sign (§§), using the convention previously used by John to distinguish spoken quotation from written quotation in analysis of L1 classroom activities (Gordon, 2019).

This is what Catherine said when the student finished reading the opening of *Jane Eyre*, Chapter 6:

§ Therein §§ [0.2]

>now that's a really interesting way of< phrasing it isn't it

>can we go back to that< [2.0]

§ In the course of the day I was enrolled as a member of the *fourth* class [0.2]

regular tasks and occupations were assigned to me [1.0] Hitherto §§

>so up until this point<

§ I had only been a spectator to proceedings at Lowood [0.2] I was now to become an actor therein §§

Jane's at school but what does it make it sound like she's *in*? (0.1) What does it make it sound *like*? (0.2) It says she was

§ enrolled §§

she was given

§ tasks §§

she had previously been

§ a spectator §§

she's now

§ become an actor §§

What does it make it sound *like* –

### 3.2 Catherine's notes: Reflecting on the recording

Even though the section had been well read by a student, I found myself repeating the sentence aloud that I specifically wanted them to focus on.

*I had only been a spectator of the proceedings;*

*I was now to become an actor therein.*

The word the student had previously stumbled on, 'hitherto', I read and also defined with 'that means' within the flow of my reading. When giving the students time to think on the question, I deliberately picked out the quotes and lexical field that I wanted them to focus in on: 'enrolled', 'spectator', 'actor'. Even when the correct answer was given: "It sounds like she's at, like she got enrolled at a drama school type thing", I was surprised at how I still continued reading the key parts of the text that had led to this answer.

*now an actor therein.*

When developing the answer, "does it feel like a real thing to Jane?", I then repeated the key words from the section we had read.

*Spectator, actor*

*Spectator*

*Actor*

*Actor actor actor*

repeated several times within my instruction to guide the students to understand the metaphoric connotations here – that Jane feels like it's fake, that it's a performance.

*A change had taken place in the weather*

*Now an actor therein*

### 3.3 Dena, reviewing her role in co-ordinating our inquiry across schools

I'm quite sad that I didn't get the opportunity to take part. I didn't record myself in the end because I'm not having my own classes at the moment. It was really difficult,

*Had only been a spectator of the proceedings*

but in terms of organising it was sharing the research with colleagues first of all, chatting to them about the background that John shared with me, and then figuring out which colleagues would find it valuable and would get the most out of it. So a large part of it was a general e-mail to start with, then having one to one conversations and organising the meetings, trying to check in with them quite regularly to say

do you need any support for the recording?  
do you want me to have a listen to it?  
do you want to chat about it?

but, to be honest, it wasn't much extra for me

*How small my portion seemed*

especially once we'd had those meetings and they were all in place. It wasn't like a big workload. It was a lot of conversations we've been having anyway, around dialogic teaching, it just fitted in quite seamlessly, so there wasn't much preparation to help colleagues to understand what it was for.

### 3.4 Robert

*My delivery was quick – perhaps too quick.*

*As a result, in the first few recordings, I heard that there was a lot of low-level disruption and background noise, clicking of pens, whispering, that I wasn't picking up in the classroom.*

*I also heard myself sometimes interrupting or moving on before a student had had time to compose and deliver their thoughts.*

### 3.5 Eve, explaining how she prepared a recording of literary conversation in her classroom

Dena asked for anyone who would like to take part, explained the project and sent out the proposal. I thought it was really interesting because reading is such a huge part of English and I was really interested in how we do that effectively, how we assist students in looking for specific things in a text. By the time students reach us in secondary school they are quite reasonable readers for narrative and context. They're not necessarily as well-versed in reading for inference and hidden meaning, and it's really hard to teach that skill to them, so I was really interested to see if looking at how we teach reading would be something that would assist in improving their inference

I went for a middle set year seven group (aged 11–12) because I wanted to see a class that needed a bit of everything. They needed a little bit of scaffolding, but they are also quite confident readers. So I went for a group in the middle, and we started with *Oliver Twist*,

*It was late next morning when Oliver awoke, from a sound, long sleep.*

purely because it's quite a tricky text. People think it's a lot easier than it is, but actually there's a lot of detail in there that gets skipped over, and Dickens is something that they carry right the way through to their GCSEs. The exam board seem to have quite a preference for including a Dickens piece in the exams, so it

seemed like a good thing to start with to see if there was something I could do differently, or if what I was doing was getting the results I wanted.

The process for me was really about finding a piece of reading that wasn't used purely for understanding and narrative. It was about looking at something we wanted the students to go on to do, rather than them simply being able to tell us what happens and describe a character's actions and behaviours. In the first instance it was me sitting down and looking for a passage of text for reading in the lessons I was about to teach. I wanted students not just to have a surface level understanding, I wanted them to be able to then take the information onto the next task, to actually be able to write about it.

### 3.6 Transcript: Erin's recordings shared in group meeting, 13 December 2022

John prepared this transcript of some of Erin's recording rapidly, between receiving sound files shared by Dena at 14:07 and our meeting at the academy trust's teacher development centre later in the same afternoon at 16:30. The purpose of making and sharing the transcription

*awoke, from a sound*

was to demonstrate how transcripts could be generated with relative ease, and to illustrate their potential for affording 'noticings' relative to the audio files: their different materialities draw attention to different things.

John made the transcript

*some very minute inscription*

by importing Erin's sound file to the 'Dictate' and 'Transcribe' functions available in Microsoft Word. The application autogenerated the text, including timecodes, in a few minutes. John made a few minor edits to words or phrases that were obviously inaccurate renderings of what was said, but otherwise the transcript shared at the meeting was similar. The transcript presented here has been further edited and formatted, without annotations reflecting prosodic features, and includes students' turns:

Erin	So, the chapters we've read this week: Oliver has been taken in by an old man called Fagin. Oliver thinks this is a kind thing because he is n- 1-2-3 -	
Students	naïve	<i>chorused</i>
Erin	and that makes him 1-2-3 -	
Students	vulnerable	<i>chorused</i>
Erin	so he's taken in by Fagin. He's naïve, so he's vulnerable. Fagin teaches him a game. The aim is to take things out of Fagin's pocket without Fagin feeling it. What is Fagin - hands up - really teaching Oliver to do?	
Student	[unclear]	
Erin	Fantastic, he's teaching him to be a pickpocket. Dodger and Charlie take Oliver out into the city. Who can tell us what happens when Dodger and Charlie take Oliver out into the city for the first time?	

Student	Basically they rob an old man and we found out now that his name is Mr Brownlow.
Erin	Excellent,
Student	and so they rob him, and Charlie and Dodger run away, but Oliver's still there. And then Oliver starts running, but he gets stuck behind things, like a carriage, and then he gets framed for being a thief.
Erin	Fantastic. So, Dodger and Charlie run because they are not n- they are not what? They're not-
Student	naïve <i>chorused</i>
Erin	They are not naïve, and they leave Oliver behind, and by the time Oliver realises what's going on, people think he is the one that took the handkerchief out of Mr. Brownlow's pocket. Oliver is caught and Oliver is taken to the courthouse.

The transcript represents an interplay of small stories, from Erin's first turn, recasting the text, to the student's contributions, which elaborate. Erin's prompts to students' repeated chorus of 'naïve' and 'vulnerable' orient them to an interpretive reading position and aim to consolidate their understanding and recollection of these terms by orchestrating modalities of talk as pattern, in time, between speakers, and relative to the glossed study narrative.

We nominated short extracts of our recordings that we wanted to share and discuss in the meeting.

### 3.7 Erin, on her reading of *Oliver Twist*, Chapter 13

I chose the section that I recorded because I think I'm quite good at getting students excited about reading, but I was a little bit concerned that in getting them excited about what they were reading I may not be getting them to think about the language intensely. I thought that I may be drawing their focus more to character because I originally trained as an actor, so I tend to do a lot of character performance when I'm reading. I was a bit worried that it might be taking them away from the language and really focusing them on what Bill does and how he sounds, or it may be misleading them, giving them an impression of the character of Bill through the way I was performing it rather than actually looking at the words.

\*

First word, 'the'. Place your tracking device on there and 3-2-1,

Specific instructions again about how the  
reading will be conducted.

§ The man (0.2) who growled out these words (0.1) was a stoutly-built §§  
heavy, wide  
§ fellow of about five-and-thirty §§  
thirty-five  
§ in a black velveteen coat, very soiled §§  
very dirty  
§ drab breeches §§  
trousers

§ lace-up half boots, and grey cotton stockings which enclosed a bulky pair of legs, with large swelling calves - the kind of legs, which in such costume, always look in an unfinished and incomplete state without a set of fetters §§

fetters are leg cuffs

§ to garnish them §§

Stopping on 'garnish' to build on current schema around use of the word 'garnish'

§ He had a brown hat on his head, and a dirty belcher handkerchief round his neck: with the long frayed ends of which he smeared the beer from his face as he spoke. He disclosed, when he had done so, a broad heavy countenance §§

a heavy face

§ with a beard of three days' growth, and two scowling eyes; one of which displayed various parti-coloured §§

different coloured, bruised

§ symptoms of having been recently damaged in a blow §§

[*'Blow' not evident in audio, but teacher models the action of a punch with the word 'blow'*]

§ 'Come in, d'ye hear?' [*in London 'Cockney' accent and guttural voice*] growled this engaging ruffian. A white shaggy dog, with his face scratched and torn in twenty different places, skulked into the room. 'Why didn't you come in afore?' [*guttural, accented*] said the man. 'You're getting too proud to own me afore company, are you? Lie down! §§

\*

I think listening to the recording really held up how much I rely on performing a character, so that when I come back to quoting a character, I do it in the same nuance, and I do it in the same accent.

Character again to show who is speaking when and to build up an impression of the character if the speech of the character may be hard for students to decipher.

I wasn't sure how effective that was. That was something that I noticed. It really made me think about whether that was the best way to recap for them, whether it made them reliant on their listening skills rather than their remembering skills, if that makes sense.

Reiterating and explaining areas while in the flow of the text- possibly could lead students to lose where they are in the text if they are not instructed to stop.

They would hear the accent, and they would know that "oh, that's Bill Sykes", rather than thinking about if that description builds Sykes.

#### 4. AN INQUIRING ASSEMBLAGE: CONVERSATIONS ABOUT LITERARY CONVERSATIONS

In presenting the voices of people and texts participating in our assemblage, we have sought to suggest what we have learned through their inter-relation as well as in what they state. We have attempted a form of posthuman expression in the area of new materialism (Coole & Frost, 2010), trying to convey what particular methods or

techniques ‘actually *do*’ (Fox & Alldred, 2021, p. 105) during research. We wanted to see how the concept of Pedagogic Literary Narration and some of the research tools associated with it—making and transcribing brief recordings of literary conversations—might morph when adopted by teachers and when used to support professional development. Our voices presented in different modes across this article state and suggest what we found valuable about the process, though we want to resist articulation of easily translatable findings because we ‘do not assume that (empirical) evidence can be isolated from context and ‘applied’ or ‘collected’ as if it were an object’ (Fox & Alldred, 2021). We are drawn to the term ‘practice-based evidence’ (p. 105), rather than evidence-based practice, to describe our data which convey the heterogeneous phenomena of literary conversations and the value of heterogeneous responses to them, which nevertheless find useful and mutually supporting expression in collective professional development activity. Our assemblage suggests the haecceity of each literary conversation—the essence that makes each one the kind of thing it is, and which makes it different from any other—and how that haecceity may also need to be mirrored in how we consider each literary conversation relative to our individual professional practices, dispositions and talents in order to develop, with agency, in our pedagogy.

## 5. DIRECTIONS

### 5.1 *Dena, on implementing the approach across the academy trust*

I think that opportunity for teachers to see research, to take it for themselves, has been really powerful. I think the following meeting that we had showed how passionate colleagues were about the fact that they learnt so much from just one recording. They were already making changes to their practice, and it felt they had ownership over it, so rather than something being done to them, they were going “oh, I’ve found this out of my own class, so I’m going to change this”. They are motivated to make the necessary changes, rather than it being something where maybe the school leadership have said “this is a good idea”, and then they do it for a few days and then forget about it again. I think that ownership might mean—hopefully—that there’s a bit more longevity in the changes being enacted.

I think it needs to have leadership in schools on board, because if leadership teams understood how powerful it could be they would make sure that time was made available, and resources. John lent us recording equipment, but something like that is so difficult to access in a school, but if a department just had something like that and it became part of the departmental approach... maybe one colleague a week in a department will record something and then take it to a CPD session in that department, and they’ll all look at it together. If that became the approach they used to reflect on their practice, and it was something that was established and was a routine for the department, I think it could work really well. I think the potential issue is that it’s a single teacher or a group of teachers. And because it’s not something

that's widely known - or if it is known, not appreciated perhaps - there's no support for the teachers to do it, because I do think once teachers have used the approach, I think they would be on board very quickly.

## 6. CODA

Think of a traffic cone, an MP3 file:

*an actor therein,*

*awoke from a sound. Some very minute inscription.*

*Speculate, garnish –*

*now that's a really interesting way of phrasing it, isn't it?*

*A change has taken place.*

*And that's where we are up to today. We're going to carry on reading.*

*You're going to need your copy of the story.*

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