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**Discursive Reception Studies – A Path toward Knowledge about
Fiction in Everyday Life
(Abstract)**

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The study of mainstream consumers of fiction is still limited, as is research of naturalistic reading situations. In this paper I argue that a combination of reception theory and discursive psychology – discursive reception research – can be a fruitful method for empirical literary studies. Reception theory gains both a way to adequately analyze conversations about literature (and other aesthetic products), and the opportunity to study how the reception is done and how literature is used, while discursive psychology, in turn, gains the opportunity to »dementalyze« a practice that has previously been surrounded by a strict cognitivist paradigm. Literature and other aesthetic products such as film and theater often deal with existential questions. In this way, conversation data on aesthetic reception provides a greater breadth of such content than does other natural conversation data. I argue that discursive psychology provides systematic tools and concepts for analyzing talk that can be useful for literary scholars who mostly deal with fiction. In addition, discourse analysis of conversation transcripts resembles the analysis of literary texts, making talk seem less alien to analyze for those who are accustomed to studying written text. The analytical tools used in discursive psychology thus provide literary scholars with adequate help for the analysis of conversations. The advantage of using discursive psychology and discourse analysis when researching reception is that a detailed analysis of the interaction reveals how participants create a shared reading of literature (Fish 1998). In much of the previous reception research, the researcher has only considered the respondent's answer and not how the answer, or the reading, emerges in the conversation. In some examples, I show how an interactional focus on booktalk enables us to highlight children's voices as part of a common social practice, for example in a discussion about withdrawing when one is feeling sad. I also show how the booktalk participants refer to traditional gender positions in a conversation about the characters in a book. I show how a teacher presents his own hypothesis about people from other parts of the world in booktalk. My hope is to add another dimension and in this way highlight the importance of teachers taking careful consideration when they use fiction – books as well as film – in an attempt to create contrasting images to undemocratic conditions, as the Swedish school curriculum requires. In addition to the experiences conveyed in the conversations, I also show examples of how people in conversation about literature can position themselves as, e. g., a booklover, a guy or as enlightened. This type of analysis also gives insights into how booktalk reception is done. Detailed analyses of conversations about books provide opportunities to study the connection between fiction and life. In this way, our knowledge of literature in practice increases, allowing us to address questions such as: How is literature used to create ourselves and position others, to portray us as good or well-read, as belonging to the cultural elite or as not being a snob? How can discussions about literature be used to quarrel, flirt, make friendships, etc.? How are the concepts ›reader‹ and ›non-reader‹ construed in young people's identity work?

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