

“For a few minutes I could pretend I was someone else” – a study of multiple approaches to fiction reading activities

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Abstract

This empirical study researches a literary reading process. 8th grade pupils participate in a close reading of a short story, *Magrete Kind* (Zwilmeyer, 1895), in which they engage with different types of fiction reading activities (Norwegian: “fiktive lesemåter”). The process takes place in a professional workshop, an arena for working systematically with teaching quality in teacher education. The purpose of this article is to contribute to knowledge about the composition of experience-based processes in reading fiction, where the pupil’s reader role becomes visible. The study is anchored in literary and dramaturgical theory, and fictionalization is central. The dramaturgical analyses show that the pupils like to work collectively and in role. They also enjoy working bodily and spatially, and are positive about staging and remediating the short story. Their approach to text is often text-external, and they are oriented towards thematic and relational layers of meaning. The remediation of the short story gives the students a good text experience, but this means that they move away from the original narrative.

Keywords: *dramaturgical analysis; fictionalization literature didactics; professional workshop; reader experience*

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I loved performing in front of others. But I was just as happy to act out scenes when I was alone in my room, or in my head during a boring lesson. I was a chosen warrior with supernatural powers. I was the wicked queen she must challenge. I was the innocent child to be saved. In my imagination, I could be anyone, at any time, in any world. It was as if I had ten thousand extra lives, and I did not understand how people could settle for just one. (Elfgren, 2017, p. 36, our translation)

Through reading, you can imagine living other people’s lives. You can enter several roles, feel different emotions, try out new situations and explore the unknown. One boy in our study described his reading experience as follows: “For a few minutes

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“For a few minutes I could pretend I was someone else”

I could pretend I was someone else”. He engaged with a short story intellectually and emotionally – with head and heart. The eighth grader was taking part in a Norwegian lesson, where the teacher worked with different ways of fiction reading activities¹ (Steffensen, 2005, p. 121). Literature enabled the boy to experience other people’s lives, other times and situations. The text gave him “ten thousand extra lives”. When pupils say something like this, there is a good reason to examine the teaching of literature in more detail.

What happens in the teaching of literature?

In the teaching of literature, a distinction is often made between experience-based and analytical approaches to working with texts (Rødnes, 2014). An experience-based approach draws upon the reader’s experiences and life knowledge in the encounter with the text. An analytical approach emphasises the text itself; for example, literary techniques are studied. In a recently published book, *What happens in Norwegian lessons?* Blikstad-Balas and Roe (2020, p. 98) state they are “surprised at how little teachers in the Norwegian lessons [...] emphasized the students’ experiences and reading experiences”. In literature lessons, there is frequently a learning of genre features and texts are linked to literary periods (Gabrielsen et al., 2019). When pupils are engaged in a hunt for literary techniques, the texts themselves are reduced. Such a way of reading devalues the intrinsic quality of literature (Eyde & Skovholt, 2017; Fodstad, 2017, 2019) and hardly facilitates meaningful literary encounters (Gabrielsen in Heie, 2019). Several researchers, therefore, call for a didactics of literature which focuses on the reader’s resources (knowledge and experiences) as the starting point for her understanding of the text; (i.e. Penne, 2010, p. 43, 2013). The ways of reading fiction that we explore are those activities where students imagine and form opinions about the themes, figures and language of a text.

The purpose of this empirical study is to contribute to knowledge about and provide concrete examples of how teachers can compose experience-based reading processes for pupils who are working with fiction. The study focuses on different reading activities in a lesson that examines ways of reading literature. The text that is used is a short story; *Magrete Kind* by Dikken Zwilgmeyer (1895). 8th grade pupils participate in a reading process in a professional workshop, an arena for professional practice. Afterwards, dramaturgical analyses are made of this process: We study how teaching is composed, how pupils reflect on the ways of reading, and what effect this has on their relation with the text. Our main question is: *What characterises the dramaturgy of a literature lesson that is centred on reading and the reading experience?*

¹ In Norwegian: *fiktive lesemåter*.

We then study the lesson activities that focus on ways of reading fiction by asking the questions:

- Which ways of reading fiction does the teacher use and what characterises these?
- What do the pupils say about these activities and how do they experience the text?

The relevance of the study

The relevance of this study may be found in Norwegian curricular plans; LK20 and the curriculum for the teaching of Norwegian. These lay the groundwork for collaborative work with literature, through a core element entitled “Text in context”. Curricular plans also require that pupils read whole texts (Bakken, 2019). It is further stated that pupils should have literary experiences and be offered the possibility of expressing themselves creatively and inventively, in the subject. With the help of imaginative fiction, pupils should reflect on central values and moral questions (Ministry of Education and Research, 2019, paragraph 1). Reading fiction is also emphasized in interdisciplinary curriculum themes, such as ‘democracy and citizenship’ and ‘public health and life skills’. By working with such themes, pupils will have the chance to confirm or challenge their own self-understandings. In this way, reading can contribute to identity development and life mastery (Directorate for Education and Training, n.d., paragraph 1). Reading fiction is essential if pupils, as *citizens of the world*, are to develop their imaginations and fantasies, and gain a knowledge of history and social conditions (Nussbaum, 2016, p. 16, 25, 29). Literature can help them to become more thoughtful and lead to deeper emotional understandings of others (Moi, 2013, p. 11). A reading process can, in other words, facilitate self-insight and knowledge, but there must be a pedagogy that enables it. This study shows a reading process with activities that focuses on ways of reading fiction.

The study has also been motivated by two empirical studies of the teaching of literature in Swedish and Norwegian lower secondary schools. Gunilla Molloy (2002) examines what happens in the meeting between teacher, literature and pupils, and she finds *conflicts*. One central conflict is that the teacher is engrossed by factual information about the text, such as language and narrative structure, while pupils are more concerned with what the text means for them – can they enter it and are there parallels to their own lives? Molloy recommends that teachers become aware of the questions that pupils ask about the text. This demands a degree of curiosity, and it is not always the case that pupils automatically ask questions. We believe that reading fiction can help pupils to marvel at the lives of others.

Sylvi Penne examines (2006) how teachers and pupils from different socio-economic and cultural backgrounds create meaning in a text. Pupils’ individual reading histories are short. They remember little of what they read and use emotional criteria when working with texts. This can support the argument that there should be collaborative classroom activities where teachers and pupils together experience,

talk about and interpret fiction. Such an arena can help to build literary competence (Solbu & Hove, 2017).

A number of studies point out that teachers forget to teach reading. Their pupils' reading is a starting point for writing activities, and thus the pupils' writing role is more clearly defined than the reading role (Gabrielsen et al., 2019). It is only extracts that are read, extracts that illustrate phenomena such as literary periods (Skaug & Blikstad-Balas, 2019). “Several Scandinavian studies suggest that when an emphasis is put on literary history and textual knowledge, pupils feel the text does not concern them” (Rødnes, 2014, p. 7, our translation). Such reading gives little training or competence in taking other peoples' perspectives, and pupils tend to tie reading experiences to their own primary discourse. Reading does not move pupils very deeply (Rødnes, 2014, p. 7). At the same time, we know that stories about the lives of others, read with a reader-oriented approach, help to develop empathy (Sørensen, 2011) and the understanding of other people's feelings, situations and needs (Andersen, 2011, p. 20). Reading can be an experimental space (Skraftun, 2009). In this study we use dramaturgy to examine something we find empirical examples of in literature pedagogy research: Collective reading experiences that focus on pupils' reading experience.

Study design

Our study can be explained as practice-led research (Rasmussen, 2013; Østern, 2017); it is centered around practice (a school class), where we work in the tensions between theory and practice, proximity and distance (Knudsen, 2018). As researchers, we are closely involved with practice, in that we ourselves design and teach a reading process. In retrospect, from a distance, we use a theoretical lens (dramaturgical theory) to analyse this process. Such a design is founded on a basic notion of dramaturgical theory that is often developed through combining practical actions (teaching) and theory (Lehmann, 1996, p. 710; Szatkowski, 1989, p. 384).

When we research our own teaching, we adopt a so-called *insider position* (Kvernbekk, 2005). In this study, our knowledge and experience of teaching is an advantage. We are secure in trying out dramaturgical approaches and activities in a broad didactic repertoire. A potential disadvantage is *home blindness* (Fangen, 2010, p. 29; Gullestad, 1991), since we are very close to the material. We have therefore tried to take an “outsider-perspective” by asking questions like: “What do these actions mean to the actors?” (Erickson et al., 1980, p. 2). We have also emphasised an emic perspective, a participant perspective, through pupil texts and pupil interviews.

The arena was a professional workshop, an established physical arena and way of working used in teacher education at the University of South-Eastern Norway (Hegerstrøm, 2015 Lindstøl, 2018; Meld. St. 16 (2016–2017), p. 50). In this arena, students and their lecturers compose, implement and evaluate their teaching. This work is multi-disciplinary and students are active. For the purposes of this study,

we expanded the arena, inviting a randomly selected 8th grade class to take part. 25 pupils and one teacher participated.² The authors, who are both researchers and teacher trainers (Norwegian and Drama), led the teaching.

The reading process was based on a short story, *Magrete Kind* (Zwilmeyer, 1895). Inger Johanne, the first-person narrator, tells us about Magrete, who is seen as boring and ordinary. She is excluded from the group of friends. One day Magrete gives a party. The family lives in cramped conditions and is poor. The party is an untraditional one. The gathering ends well, but Magrete continues to be excluded, until she dies. The narrator asks for forgiveness on her deathbed, and the girls are reconciled. The story is told retrospectively, and Inger Johanne appears to be remorseful.

We chose this short story because we wanted to work with a complete, classic text that pupils would probably resist. It is set in the last century and there are a number of archaic words and ways of speaking.³ The theme of exclusion will always be topical, but the forms in which it is realised refer to old-fashioned games and dances. The short story demands that pupils open themselves to unfamiliar contexts. There is, for example, a gap between what the characters say is the reason for excluding Magrete (she is “boring”), and what a trained reader will pick up (unspoken class divisions). Our hypothesis is that the ways of reading fiction can lead (or seduce) pupils into the text. At the same time, we are aware that texts which are far from the pupils’ world can be resisted and not bring about any empathetic response (Myhr, 2019).

Our material was drawn from three lessons. Teaching was filmed with two cameras (front and back), and the recording was roughly transcribed, emphasising meaningful content. Two observers wrote field notes. Our material was used to answer questions related to the process’s dramaturgical structure and activities. After the classes we collected written pupil texts and interviewed pupil groups about the reading activities (See Appendix 1 for the interview guide). This material shed light on the pupils’ reception.

Ways of reading fiction: Empathising and imagining

Reading fiction contributes to the development of a narrative imagination, i.e. the ability to enter another person’s world. This happens when we attribute feelings, thoughts and needs to a literary character (Nussbaum, 2016, pp. 30–45). Such a process presupposes that pupils actively imagine, empathize with and try to understand a character in the context of the place and time he/she inhabits:

² The project is reported to NSD. Permission was given and all participation was voluntary.

³ Norwegian words such as “gresselig alminnelig”, “handelsreisende”, “gnav”, “hus forbi” and “masurka”.

This means the ability to think what it might be like to be in the shoes of a person different from oneself, to be an intelligent reader of that person’s story, and to understand the emotions and wishes and desires that someone so placed might have. (Nussbaum, 1997, pp. 10–11)

A reader who empathises without fully identifying with the character who is observed is, according to Irene Engelstad, a *discerning observer* (2016, p. 11). The reader is open, impartial and not self-interested. This stance requires both closeness and distance between the reader and the fictional character. A discerning observer reads attentively with a fair and loving gaze (Moi, 2013). It can be easier to feel empathy when we know that events and persons are fictional; fiction protects and creates distance, and the reader is free of any real obligation (Keen, 2007, p. 4, pp. 18–19).

We can distinguish two approaches to reading; an *external* and an *internal* (Claudi, 2010, p. 7). With a *text-internal* approach, the text is interpreted in terms of composition, language, how characters are drawn, etc. The *text-external* approach interprets the text in the light of external factors, such as one’s own experiences and associations. Most reading of fiction combines both approaches. A precondition for reading fiction and developing a narrative imagination is that one reads with an awareness of double layers of meaning.⁴ This can be explained in the following way: “Through reading in a fictional manner, one will automatically seek for something else in the text, something more than the literal meaning.” (Steffensen, 2005, p. 138, our translation). One has to read metaphorically and be able to give things, characters and events a more symbolic meaning and create relationships between elements within a text (Hanssen, 2011, p. 150). In the context of literature didactics, it is a matter of developing the pupil’s ability to grasp the deeper meaning of the text (Drangeid, 2014, p. 77; Hetmar, 2001, p. 16).

In dramaturgical perspective, it can be argued that we depend on our imagination to understand the world around us. Fiction is one of the expressions of this ability (Gladso et al., p. 182). The term *fiction* comes from the Latin *factio*, which is derived from *fingere*, meaning ‘to imagine, invent and shape’ (de Caprona, 2013, p. 621). Fiction must be fantasized, invented, drawn, written down, communicated or staged – in one form or another, imagined or not. Fiction is a prerequisite for creating, thinking and learning (Rasmussen & Kristoffersen, 2014). It can protect us so that we can try out, express and anchor new and perhaps unfamiliar thoughts, language and interpretations (Rasmussen & Kristoffersen, 2014). The active identification process is called *fictionalization* – this requires that pupils shape perceptions and interpretations that they find meaningful, affect others, or simply represent a text (Gladso et al., 2015, p. 183).

Fictionalization can be expressed in different ways. These can be oral, written, spatial or physical. They can be collective or individual. They can be text-internal or text-external. Fictionalization can have different aesthetic qualities: from the

⁴In Norw.: *fordobling* (Steffensen, 2005, p. 138).

poetic and symbolic to the more authentic and realistic (Gladsø et al., 2005, p. 5, 25; Rasmussen, 2008, p. 344), and there are various ways of framing it (Goffman, 1986, pp. 10–11). Recent dramaturgical studies explain fictionalization precisely as a form of framing where fiction fixes, or fastens, performances in a form (Gladsø et al., 2015, p. 182). An open frame allows pupils to create, compose and make associations that arise from their own perspectives and experiences. A closed frame is often perceived as more fixed, but a limited choice can in fact also allow for creativity, since one must try to break out of habit and explore new perspectives (Christoffersen, 2011, pp. 135–138). Viewed from the perspective of literature didactics, this means that forms of fiction that limit and frame pupils' interpretive space can, to a greater extent than more open ones that *force* pupils to identify with the *unknown* and make up their minds about the text. If this is to happen, the framing must allow them to express hypotheses, feelings, interpretations and ideas (Jamieson, 2015; Leake 2016).

Dramaturgical analysis of a reading process

Kjølner & Szatkowski (1991, p. 192) have developed 4 areas of dramaturgical analysis:

- a) a theatre text analysis, which is related to the starting point (the text)
- b) a production analysis (transformation to stage text)
- c) a performance analysis (director's and actors' intentions)
- d) a reception analysis (how the public responds to the performance)

These areas have later been adapted to teaching (Bakke, 2019; Lindstøl, 2018; Østern, 2014, p. 20). Briefly stated, such analyses enable us to examine the *content* that teaching is based on (a) and how this content is transformed into teaching (b). One can look at how teaching is performed (c) or how it is received, i.e. what pupils learn and how they perceive and evaluate the teaching.

In this study, we analyse the implementation and reception of teaching (c) and (d) by examining potential relationships between ways of reading fiction and pupil reception of this activity. We conduct two dramaturgical analyses. First, we analyse the dramaturgy of the reading process. This primary analysis prepares the way for the next stage, a close-up analysis of reading activities. Finally, we analyse the pupils' reception of the teaching.

The dramaturgy of the reading process

The process of reading about *Magrete Kind* started like this:

Students walk in a line into the classroom. On their way, there are pieces of paper with quotes from the short story – such as 'horribly ordinary', 'ugh!', 'boring', 'red fruit dessert', 'whisper'. We hear a hollow, sad, non-vocal version of the "Happy Birthday" song. On the screen there is a picture of an obituary for the main character, "Magrete". Pupils walk around, reading and listening, before sitting in a circle.

“For a few minutes I could pretend I was someone else”

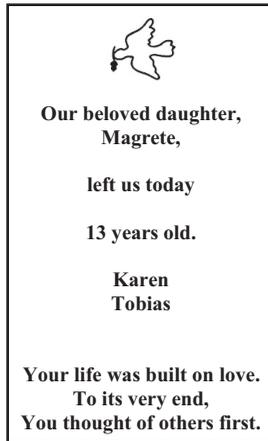


Figure 1. Obituary shown on the classroom smartboard

The first step in a dramaturgical analysis is to draw a chronological outline of the teaching process (Bakke & Lindstøl, 2021). The timeline gives a bird’s-eye view of events:

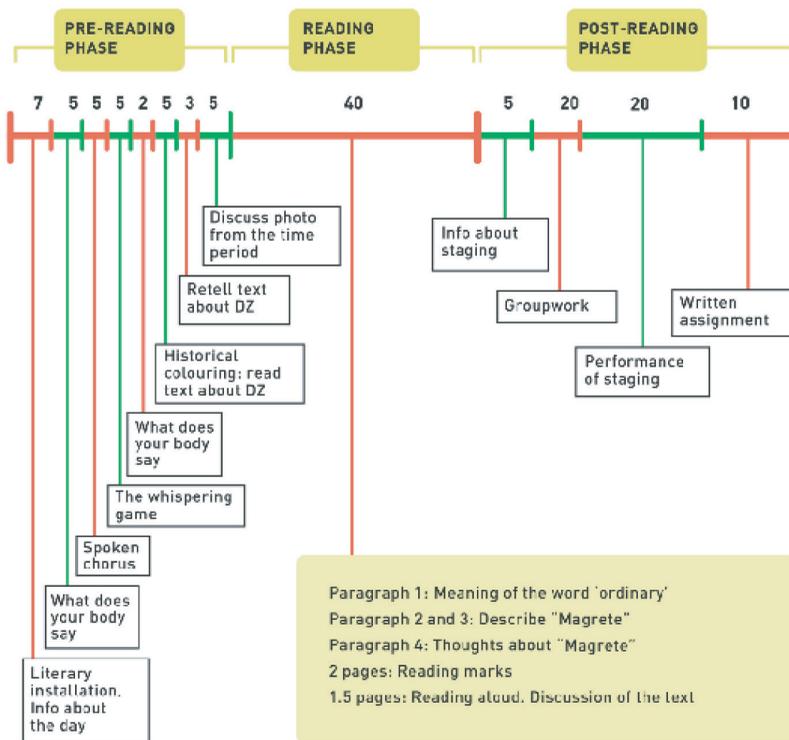


Figure 2. The reading process⁵

In drawing the outline, we first mark the dramaturgical phases: Introduction (pre-reading), main part (reading phase), and conclusion (post-reading). We then list all of

the events that make up the different phases. An event is defined as an activity which has an internal coherence (Bakke, 2019, p. 119) that can be defined by an umbrella concept (e.g. ‘the whispering game’). We use verbs to define activities (e.g. “retell text”) to express the activity that dominates the event. In our overview, every other activity is marked in green or red. The vertical lines mark breaks between events. The time that each event takes is noted – the first activity takes 7 minutes. This outline helps to reveal the dramaturgical structures that are often termed 1st order structures (Szatkovsky, 1989, p. 32, 2017).

At this first-order level, we can see that the introductory phase lasts for 37 minutes and comprises 8 events. When the pupils come into the room, they see a literary installation (described above), and receive information about what they will be doing. They then take part in various activities that arouse their curiosity and inform them about the theme, author and literary period. They work with “What does your body say?” – an exercise where pupils use their bodies to express what they think about different claims or central concepts (see Bakke & Lindstøl, 2016, pp. 138–139). They are presented with general statements before being given text-related ones, such as “Every girl in the class must be invited to the birthday party”. Pupils also speak in chorus in an activity called “In the hen yard” (see Bakke & Lindstøl, 2016, pp. 140–141). This is a warm-up exercise, where they declaim sentences from the short story in a cacophony; e.g. “She was so horribly ordinary “. The pupils then play “The whispering game” (see Bakke & Lindstøl, 2018, pp. 290–291). They whisper words and sentences from the text, such as “[...] then we might get rid of her more quickly” (p. 181). Pupils are given between-the-lines speaking instructions about intonation, volume and tone of voice. The next activity provides some historical colouring; the text “A gutsy girl” (Bakke, 2005) is read out loud. This text has the same setting as the short story – the small town of Risør in the 1890s – and we meet Zwiłgmeyer, the author. The pupils listen and retell central points. Finally, the pupils are given photos from the period, which they describe and discuss in pairs.

The reading phase lasts for 40 minutes and consists mainly of just one activity – reading aloud. The teacher reads, inserting pauses, questions (e.g. “What do we mean by a ‘normal’ girl?”) or tasks (e.g. “Describe Magrete directly and indirectly”). Pupils then read individually, making ‘Reading marks’ (Kverndokken, 2012, pp. 88–91); i.e. they say what they think about the text by writing emoticons in the margin, such as ! (important), ? (I don’t understand), ☺ (fun). This phase concludes with a discussion about the text, where any difficult words can be explained.

The post-reading phase consists of 4 events, and lasts 55 minutes. The central event is the staging of *Magrete Kind*. In groups of 2–4, pupils work with different assignments to create a performance (see Bakke & Lindstøl, 2016, pp. 224–225). Briefly stated, pupils interpret the short story by assembling small, short scenes of ½–2 minutes. The scenes include specialist explanations of concepts such as identity and covert bullying, conversations between classmates, a wish list from the mother to her daughter, a dialogue from the birthday party, the priest’s eulogy. The scenes

“For a few minutes I could pretend I was someone else”

are performed on 4 chairs in the middle of the room and there are no breaks. Pupils wander into and out of the performance area, and the rest of the class sits around. Music and photographs link the scenes

The next step is to study the reading process again, recursively. This is the 2nd order of analysis. Our outline is adjusted and we see that analytical categories emerge. We see that there are 17 events, spread over 132 minutes. In the long reading phase (8 events, 37 minutes), there are rapid shifts between activities. We see that great emphasis is placed on motivating pupils to read; they must work physically and spatially, using several senses. Almost all activities involve fictionalization (e.g. “What does your body say?”). The reading phase (5 events, 40 minutes) takes time, even though *Magrete Kind* is a very short story. Some of the text is read aloud, while other parts are read individually. The reading is interspersed with brief written and oral activities where pupils express their opinions about themes and characters. The final phase (4 events, 55 minutes) is mainly spent on staging the short story.

In total, there are 8 different activities that might be called ‘fictional’, where pupils imagine, compose, form and stage (de Caprona, 2013, p. 621) (Appendix 2). We have categorised these by asking a number of questions:

- 1) Is the activity oral or written?
- 2) What qualities does the activity have (use of space, body, voice, image, sound)?
- 3) Is the activity individual or collective?
- 4) Is it conducted in/out of role?
- 5) Is the approach text-internal and/or text-external? (See categorisation: Appendix 3).

Let us study a sample.

Analysis of events and types of fictionalization

In analysing the events, we conduct close-up analyses of one or more activities that emerge as central in the process analysis. (Bakke & Lindstøl, 2021). In the process analysis we identified three *oral forms of fictionalization* (physical/spatial, reading aloud, explaining/describing), and two *written forms* (defining/explaining, writing in role). We have conducted close-up analyses of 1–2 activities in each category. These were primarily selected on the basis of the four questions mentioned above. We then picked out events that illustrate different aspects of teaching literature that are the concern of this study: Collective ways of working, activities where readers’ resources and experiences are recognised, and activities where readers have to think about values or moral questions.

Oral forms of fictionalization

Literary installation is an example of an oral event with a physical/spatial quality. It is an out-of-role activity. The pupils’ movement affects what they observe, and how they respond. This is a collective event, since pupils have to actively relate to each other’s responses. The installation brings into play thematic (minor-key birthday music),

relational (remarks about being an outsider) and linguistic (repetitions of central words) levels of meaning. We used extracts from the short story, and thus this is a text-internal event.

“*What does your body say?*” is also a physical/spatial event. The pupils, out of role, use their own experiences to physically position themselves in the classroom according to how they react to statements that are paraphrases of themes from the short story; e.g. attitudes to bullying or rules for. The event is collective because pupils’ stances gave a real time picture of their interpretations. The event should thus be considered text-external.

Another oral activity is reading out aloud. We see this in “*The whispering game*”, where pupils read out lines from the story. They are told to *whisper* what the class thinks of Magrete. Both vocal tone and interpretation are central in this fictionalization. This event is text-internal and collective.

A last example of an oral activity is “*Explain and describe*”, where the pupils describe Magrete and explain what is meant by ‘ordinary’. The class takes an oral and collective stance to the themes, relations, contexts and language of the text, without adopting roles. Their descriptions are both text-internal and text-external.

Finally, the pupils stage *Magrete Kind* by combining the oral fictionalizations. In most of the scenes, the pupils have to identify with roles that are directly represented in the text, such as ‘mother’ or ‘friend’. In other scenes, pupils create new roles, such as ‘neighbour’, ‘father’ or ‘priest’. They use space, bodies, sound and images to interpret the thematic, relational and contextual levels of meaning in the text. Some stagings include specific textual extracts (text-internal), while others involve text-external interpretations.

The analysis of the oral fictionalizations shows that they are collective. In some of them, pupils build on personal experiences. In others, they use text extracts. A number of factors are decisive in order for pupils to relate closely to the text, adopt roles, and detect different layers of meaning. Amongst these factors are the teacher’s framing instructions, the approach adopted (text-external/text-internal), and the way in which an opening is created for fictionalization.

Written types of fictionalization

We identify two written types of fictionalization; “*Define and describe*” and “*Write in role*”. When students, for example, had to explain concepts (e.g. ‘bullying’, ‘normal’), they did it by adopting a role (e.g. an ‘expert’), as well as responding ‘themselves’. The following extract shows a pupil explaining *bullying*:

Bullying can be getting pushed about and hit, picked on, gossiped about, having rumours spread about you, threatened, frozen out, pressured to do things for others that you don’t want to [...]. There are different reasons why a person bullies someone. They may like acting tough. It may be because they are insecure about themselves. It could be because they are bullied themselves [...]. It could be because

“For a few minutes I could pretend I was someone else”

they want to be with someone in a gang. It may be because you're afraid of being bullied yourself.

All of the examples of this event were text-external and collective, pupils writing in groups.

The “*Writing in role*”-activity was conducted both individually: “Write as if you were one of Magrete’s classmates”, in pairs: “Dialogue: Mother/Magrete”, and in groups, as friends. An example of an individual, written text-external event is the assignment called “*Being a friend*”. Using the starting point of the text, the pupils imagined they were Magrete’s classmates:

Magrete Kind was in my class. She was very strange. She was quiet and boring. She wore funny clothes and didn’t have a proper case for her pencils. [...] no-one in the class liked her [...].

In the writing assignment “*This is the truth*”, pupils co-operated in writing role dialogues in a frame called “Witness examination” The following example is from an interview with “Massa” (and another pupil):

- A: What did you think of Magrete?
B: She was quiet and boring, really. Very ordinary.
A: How do you think you treated her?
B: I think I was nice to her. I could have behaved a bit better, but we weren’t best friends.
A: Is there anything you regret saying?
B: I’m sure there’s something I needn’t have said, but I don’t have any regrets. Now I would include her more and get to know her better.
A: Explain!
B: Maybe I kept her outside.
A: Why?
B: I just didn’t want to be with her. She was so boring!

In other texts, students imagine a situation (at the deathbed, in the party), a person (mother, priest, teacher) and a place (the cemetery, at Magrete’s) – inside and outside the text. Here is a eulogy, given by a pupil as the priest at Magrete’s funeral:

We are gathered here today to say goodbye to Magrete. She was born in 1969. She became ill and died of cancer. She was kind, conscientious and a little shy. Her last greeting was to her friends. She said, “I have always been very fond of you”. Magrete lived in Øvregaten in a cramped apartment and there she left her mummy and daddy. Rest in Peace!

These extracts show that the pupils distance themselves from the original text when they adopt text-external witness roles, such as those of friend or priest. In doing these assignments, they reveal thematic (being an outsider) and relational (main character – minor character) levels of meaning in the short story. A small number of concrete words and expressions from the short story are utilised (‘boring’, ‘pencil

case'). None of the texts mention contextual levels of meaning, such as time (the 1800s), place (the school) or space (the apartment).

When we compare the process analysis with the events analysis, it becomes clear that several fictional forms thematise the same layers of meaning. One layer of meaning is *thematic*, and concerns pupils' attitudes and experiences linked to exclusion and class differences. This is fictionalized in a number of ways (bodily/spatial, describe and explain, writing in role). Working with the *relational layer of meaning* involves examining relations and tensions between literary figures, both inside and outside the text. Some of the figures have central roles while others have less important ones. We also find a collective role (the classmates), and interpretation of this role is largely left up to the pupils. The relational level of meaning is addressed in all phases of the lesson, and is fictionalised by using body and space, and through writing in role. The *contextual layer of meaning*, which concerns place and (historical) time is only worked with in the reading phase, and there is no mark of it in the staging. The pupils moved the story of Magrete to more modern times. She is diagnosed with cancer, something that is not found in the short story. Few words/expressions from the original text are used, and the *linguistic layer of meaning* is most closely expressed in the *reading aloud* of parts of the text. In all, this means that two layers of meaning, the thematic and the relational, are reinforced through repetition and remediation, where various types of fictionalization are utilised. Few words/expressions from the original text are used, and the *linguistic layer of meaning* is most closely expressed in the *reading aloud* of parts of the text. In all, this means that two layers of meaning, the thematic and the relational, are reinforced through repetition and remediation, where various types of fictionalization are utilised. It is perhaps easier to address themes and relations through fictive reading processes when the text has outdated language and is set in the distant past. Both language and context can seem strange to pupils, and this will naturally make it more difficult for them to draw upon their own experiences and knowledge of life.

What do the pupils say about the reading activities?

The analysis of the teaching shows that the thematic and relational meaning layers are remediated and repeated. The thematic aspect is highlighted as positive by several pupils, and they relate the theme of exclusion to their own lives: "I felt that the text was somehow appropriate. And it gives you a little to think about [...]. If you're bad towards them, a person, you should maybe think that that person might not be here tomorrow". Another pupil links the past and the present: "Exclusion could happen today. But it would not be for the same reason, such as the fact that she had too small an apartment or that they have red fruit dessert, it would have been a little different". One girl thinks that time makes exclusion more visible: "In the 1890s, you did not have the things or gadgets you have today. Digital things make everything very visible".

“For a few minutes I could pretend I was someone else”

When we asked which activities the pupils found useful and interesting, there are some that stand out. Many pupils say they got most out of reading activities where they play a role. They find the text less heavy. One pupil emphasizes that working fictitiously provides an opportunity for seeing relationships and events from different perspectives: “It is a little different to think, for example if you are a friend, then you are in a way the villain in one story, while you are the hero of another. It is all a matter of where you stand”. Another pupil speaks about identifying with a role: “In a way, there are two roles. You play both yourself and then you play a completely different role where you may not be yourself”. Some pupils also highlight activities where they stage the text bodily, vocally and spatially: “I liked the *What does your body say?*-exercise best, because then we had to show what we meant.”

Many pupils prefer text-external roles. One boy says: “I think out scenarios. Maybe I don’t fully follow what the book says, but invent a little more. You sort of drag yourself into the world of others and make pictures in your head”. Such roles enable a freedom of interpretation: “What I didn’t remember from the book, I just made up.” One pupil elaborates: “Because I have to figure out what the priest is saying himself, it’s both more fun and more difficult. I think of the lines, I think about what could have been said”. Fiction’s creative nature is emphasized: “We reproduce the text in our own way. Our own words, our interpretation. We were experts and then we had to try to give good answers and seek out information”.

Collective activities are popular, but pupils are not used to them. One pupil says: “I think we learned most from working in groups on one thing. In the end, we got a whole story out of it. I managed the pictures, and X managed the music”. Another pupil highlights other people’s interpretations: “We do not know what the others have done, and then we put it together, it was fun.” Many use words that describe such collaboration: “What we did was teamwork. Cooperation is important.”

Overall, it can be said that the reading activities led to the class experiencing the short story as ‘nice’, ‘sad’ and ‘touching’, but also ‘boring’ and ‘depressing’. This confirms our assumption that there is pupil resistance. Students are left with ‘benefits’ and ‘good reading experiences’, but there is no automatic triggering of empathy (Myhr, 2019). At the same time, many pupils ‘lose’ the text when working on it. They compose and interpret freely and ‘refuse’ to work in a text-internal way. Perhaps there is an over-emphasis on pupil feelings and private experiences? What do students really know about the *Magrete Kind*-text? Let us discuss this from three perspectives: Proximity and distance, working together on the text, and layers of meaning and dramaturgy.

Proximity and distance

The pupils are positive about playing different fictional roles. They say that such fictionalization enables them to use their own imaginations to find out things themselves, be inventive, and be less bound to the text. This implies a preference for a text-external reading position (Claudi, 2010) in remediating *Magrete Kind*. This may

be related to the fact that many of the activities open up for what they call “adding their own twist”. Although other activities do more to encourage an active use of the text, the pupils do not make use of suggestions that they employ quotations and examples from the short story itself. There may therefore be reason to ask whether one loses sight of the original text in fictionalizing it? Do pupils train what Steffens calls “looking for something else in the text” (2005, p. 138) when they can distance themselves from it? If the goal is to read with an awareness of double layers of meaning and take a position on language, composition, character descriptions, etc. (i.e. read the text internally), this only happens to a varying degree. The fictionalizations that shape and give direction to pupils’ interpretations (Gladstø et al., 2015), should therefore be more tightly framed if the goal is to promote an internal reading. Here, the teacher’s role as dramaturge is central. The teacher must know what the main point of the reading lesson is. Is it, for example, to draw upon the reader’s experiences and knowledge of life (cf. Rødnes, 2014) in the meeting with the text, or is it to talk about the text’s literary qualities? However, it can be argued that fictionalization has activated students’ narrative imaginations (Nussbaum, 2016), when they report that stepping into a role creates *images in the head*. Seeing the characters from different perspectives and roles (being “the villain in one story while you are the hero in another”, as one pupil says), can be said to be a way to practice reading with both empathy and distance, as a *discerning observer* (Engelstad, 2016). While the didactics of literature often focus on reading closely, dramaturgy has a freer relationship with the text and can focus on the staging that is a remediation of the original. Here there is a tension. However, the one approach does not exclude the other. This study shows how one can alternate between text-external and text-internal readings. It also shows how the dramaturgy of the reading process can open or close the door to the ways we read fiction.

Working together on the text

The pupils are positive about working together on the different fictionalizations. They enjoy creating a common staging, where the sum of their groups’ different contributions becomes something else and something more than the original text. Working together produces many interpretations and, in some cases, surprising approaches. The goal that literature should function as an experimental space (Skaftun, 2009) would seem to be linked to a dialogic community of interpretation. This supports our hypothesis that collective processes contribute to an experience of text. The pupils in this study express problems in reading individually, and thus there may be grounds to promote collective working methods when it comes to the teaching of reading. It must be a goal that pupils should be able to take individual positions, but collective activity can initiate processes that will enable them to later engage with texts on their own. Through working more collectively, we will be able to share different interpretations of the text and become more sensitive to pupils’ questions (cf. Molloy). There is less of a focus on the teacher’s (definitive) reading. The dramaturgical perspective can

“For a few minutes I could pretend I was someone else”

contribute to a collective pedagogy of reading; readers will be challenged and moved, rather than lost in a hunt for literary techniques (cf. Gabrielsen et al., 2019). This study attempts to show how pupils can work collectively with texts in the classroom.

Layers of meaning and dramaturgy

In the pre-reading phase, thematic, relational, contextual and linguistic layers of meaning (Østern, 2016) are all employed. In the reading phase, little time is directly spent on linguistic or contextual aspects. It is the thematic and relational layers that are focussed on in the remediation assignments. Thus, it is maybe no surprise that pupils give no weight to either linguistic or contextual levels of meaning in the interviews. To bring into play the relational layer is maybe the most natural starting point to take in living oneself into fictional characters’ feelings and conditions (jf. Keen, 2007), while the thematic layer can help link the text to pupils’ own experiences and lifeworlds. In retrospect, we believe that a linguistic layer of meaning, where pupil must “put other people’s words and expressions into their own mouths”, will help them to come closer to the language and life of strangers, and challenge their own experiences and stereotypes. In this way, the reading lesson can be an arena for examining and expressing the thoughts, experiences and actions located in the tension between the known and the unknown. This study shows a process that alternates between experience-based and analytical approaches to the text. One response to the need for a didactic repertoire that trains pupils to read fiction can be a strategy by which we move from the text-external to the text-internal, from the collective to the individual, and from relational and thematic levels of meaning to contextual and linguistic ones. Dramaturgy is used in this study as both a theoretical lens and a practical tool. Maybe it can bring about reading experiences that will enable more readers to pretend to be someone else, if only for a few minutes.

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Appendix 1. Interview guide, pupils

1 Pupil's reader history

13 questions in this category. Questions/answers not used in this article.

2 About the text “Magrete Kind”

- A What do you think of the “Magrete Kind” story?
- B Was there anything in the text you thought was strange or difficult to understand?
- C Do you have any examples of episodes from your own life that are like what happens in the story?
- D Which associations do you make with other texts (films, short stories, songs ...) that remind you of «Magrete Kind»?
- E What do you think it was like to be a child/young person in Magrete Kind's time? What similarities or differences do you see?
- F Did you see yourself in any of the characters in the story? In what way?
- G Were there any characters you sympathised with, or the opposite – anyone who irritated you? Why?
- H Why do you think the other children didn't want to be with Magrete?

3 About the reading process

- A Which reading activity did you learn most from?
- B Which reading activity did you like best, and why? (You can also say what you learned from it.)
- C What do you think about going into a role (which is not yourself) when you work with a text?
- D What was it like to stage the text? What can you learn from it? What do you think about what you staged?
- E When you write new texts such as letters, diaries, music or pictures that are based on «Magrete Kind», does it do anything to the way you understand the short story?
- F Was the text you made and performed «the same text» as the short story we read? What is the same/different?

“For a few minutes I could pretend I was someone else”

Appendix 2. Overview of events in the teaching of fiction. Are these events text-external or text-internal?

Event	Fiction? Text-external or text-internal?
Pre-reading	
Literary installation	Fiction. Text-external and Text-internal
What does your body say?	Fiction. Text-external and Text-internal
Spoken chorus	Fiction. Text-internal
The whispering game	Fiction. Text-internal
What does your body say?	Fiction. Text-external and Text-internal
Historical colouring	Not Fiction. Text-internal
Retelling the text	Not Fiction. Text-internal
Discussing time period (photo)	Not Fiction. Text-external
Reading	
Reading and writing	None of these events are ‘Fiction’
– The word ‘ordinary’	Text-external
– Describing Magrete	Text-internal and Text-external
– Thoughts about Magrete	Text-external and Text-internal (to some extent)
– Reading marks	Text-external and Text-internal
– Reading aloud	Text-internal and Text-external
Post-reading	
Information	Not Fiction. Text-external
Groupwork (about staging)	Fiction. Text-external and Text-internal
Performance, staging	Fiction. Text-external and Text-internal
Written assignment (witness role)	Fiction. Text-external and Text-internal

Appendix 3. First categorisation of events

- 1) Is the event oral or written? What characterises the event (use of space, body, voice, images, sounds ...)?
- 2) Is the event individual or collective?
- 3) Is the event conducted in/outside of role?
- 4) Is the approach text-internal or text-external?

Oral fictionalizations

The table summarises the oral events identified in the material:

Type of fictionalization	Example from timeline	Collective/ individual	In role/ Outside of role	Text-external/ Text-internal
Bodily/spatial	<i>Literary installation</i>	Collective	Outside of role	Text-internal
	<i>What does your body say?</i>	Collective	Outside of role	Text-external
	<i>Staging</i>	Collective	In/Outside of role	Text-internal/ Text-external
Reading aloud	<i>The whispering game</i>	Collective	In role	Text-internal
	<i>Spoken chorus</i>	Collective	In role	Text-internal
Explain/describe	<i>Explain/describe</i>	Collective	Outside of role	Text-internal/ Text-external

Written fictionalizations

The table summarises the written events identified in the material:

Type of fictionalization	Examples	In role/ Outside of role	Collective/ individual	Text-external/ Text-internal
Define, explain	<i>Define and explain concepts</i>	In role/ Outside of role	Individual/ Collective	Text-external
Writing in-role	<i>A character inside or outside the text</i>	In role	Collective	Text-external/ Text-internal