Book talks among people with chronic non-cancer pain: Literary meaning making in a shared reading group

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This paper reports findings from a pilot study for the research project SHARP – Shared Reading After Pain Rehabilitation. SHARP explores the feasibility and effect of Shared Reading, a group-based reading intervention, as a way to improve the quality of life for people with chronic non-cancer pain who have undergone a pain rehabilitation programme (5 weeks) at Skåne University Hospital in Sweden. The paper has a methodological focus. Drawing on discursive reception studies (Eriksson Barajas 2015), it aims to explore the usefulness of Judith Langer's theory of literary meaning making to analyse book talk in a Shared Reading chronic non-cancer pain context. Langer's key concepts *envisionment building* and *stances* (Langer 2011) will be used to trace instances of group members taking others' perspectives, such as those of literary characters or fellow group members.
Keywords: shared reading, chronic pain, Judith Langer, envisionment, stances

Boksamtal bland personer med kronisk smärta. Litterärt meningsskapande i en shared reading-grupp: I denna rapport presenteras resultat från en pilotstudie för forskningsprojektet SHARP – Shared Reading After Pain Rehabilitation – som studerar en litteratur- och samtalsbaserad intervention riktad till personer som genomgått ett gruppbaserat smärtrehabiliteringsprogram på Skånes universitetssjukhus. Rapporten är metodologiskt inriktad. Dess syfte är att undersöka möjligheten att använda Judith Langers teori om litterärt meningsskapande för att analysera boksamtal i en grupp bestående av personer med kronisk smärta. Frågan är om man med hjälp av Langers båda nyckelbegrepp ”envisionment” och ”stances” kan beskriva deltagarnas perspektivtagande och perspektivbyte i sådana samtal.
Nyckelord: shared reading, kronisk smärta, Judith Langer, föreställningsvärld, faser

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Preface

SHARP explores the effects of a group-based intervention based on Shared Reading (SR): 8 to 12 people gather weekly with a facilitator to read and discuss literary fiction and poetry for 90 minutes. This intervention will be offered as an add-on activity to people who have undergone a pain rehabilitation programme at Skåne University Hospital.

The intervention provided by SHARP is in line with the hospital pain rehabilitation programme, based on Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT), a development within Cognitive Behavioural Therapy. The treatment is experience-based as participants interact with the rehabilitation team in role playing and other activities designed to help people to experience rather than to receive education on the main tenets of ACT.

SHARP aligns the ACT-based pain rehabilitation with SR. The joint reading aloud of literature in a SR group paves the way for deep and engaged discussions. SR group members try to understand the actions of the literary characters, and share each other's understanding as they are given the opportunity to compare their own perspectives and interpretations with those of other group members.

SHARP is cross-disciplinary, bringning together expertise in literary studies, linguistics, pain and rehabilitation medicine and psychology. The research team will analyse and assess whether language use and literary meaning-making in SR sessions may be considered additive to key processes within ACT: Do group members improve their mentalization ability? Do they report increased well-being and resilience? Do depressive symptoms, anxiety, pain rating and acceptance of pain improve? SHARP will collect and analyse a range of data: video-recorded group meetings, audio-recorded interviews, psychological tests, medical assessments and evaluations.

Background and aim

This paper reports findings from a pilot study for the research project SHARP – Shared Reading After Pain Rehabilitation. SHARP explores the feasibility and effect of Shared Reading, a group-based reading intervention described below, as a way to improve the quality of life for people with chronic non-cancer pain, who have undergone a pain rehabilitation programme (5 weeks) at Skåne University Hospital in Sweden. SHARP is a cross-disciplinary research project, which brings together expertise from literary studies, linguistics, pain and rehabilitation medicine, and psychology.

Chronic non-cancer pain constitutes a major challenge to both society and the suffering individual. It is a complex experience and its consequences in everyday life may be severe. Pain affects several life domains such as physical functioning, emotional well-being (depressive symptoms and anxiety), social relationships, and occupational capacity (SBU 2010). Unfortunately, painlessness is seldom a reachable goal for people with severe chronic non-cancer pain who qualify for pain rehabilitation programmes. Fruitless struggle with pain reduces the quality of life and makes many people with chronic non-cancer pain isolated and deprived of pleasurable experiences (SBU 2010).

The definition of pain as an '*unpleasant sensory and emotional experience* with actual or potential tissue damage, or described in terms of such damage' opens for pain experience in the absence of tissue damage (IASP). Brain image studies suggest that physical pain and social exclusion activate the same brain region (Eisenberger, Liebermann & Williams 2003). Trying to distinguish physical and psychological causes for pain is usually not possible and seldom a pathway to a treatment alliance. Thus it is a goal in pain rehabilitation to break the social isolation for people living with chronic non-cancer pain, instead of letting social isolation reinforce physical pain.

Many people with non-cancer pain tend focus on fruitless attempts to control and avoid their pain. Furthermore, cognitive processes are often affected. Previous research has shown that people with chronic non-cancer pain have an impaired capacity for *mentalization*, i.e. the ability to understand others' and one's own mental state and the intentions and feelings behind behaviour (Zunhammer, Halski, Eichhammer, Busch 2015). Experience from clinical practice has revealed that impaired *psychological flexibility* is rather common, here understood as a tendency in individuals to lose contact with important life values, an inability to remain in the present moment in a non-judgemental manner, to view the perspectives of others. Furthermore, their behaviour is based on a rigid mindset (Hayes, Strosahl, Wilson 2012).

Pain rehabilitation at Skåne University Hospital is based on Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT), a development within Cognitive Behavioural Therapy. The treatment is experience-based as participants interact with the rehabilitation team in role playing and other activities designed to help people to

experience rather than to receive education on the main tenets of ACT. The use of *metaphors* is one fundamental key in ACT to reach an understanding of the questions at stake. It is important to disentangle thinking from behavior and to do so the role of language is emphasized. *Language is therefore central* to ACT in the process of choosing a more flexible approach to living with chronic pain, allowing people to strive for what they value in life instead of fighting symptoms and experiences. ACT aims to help people to *accept* the condition of chronic pain and to live fuller lives in the presence of pain, shifting focus from attempts to control pain to efforts to reach their goals according to a value-oriented approach, i.e. *committed action*. Examples might be greater commitment in social and joyful activities, increased reading time, and engagement in cultural activities, which often have been avoided. An ACT rehabilitation programme involves home-work in order to increase activity and enrich people's behavioural repertoire. As *language is central* a more flexible language repertoire is assumed to help people in their efforts to dissociate themselves from their pain and develop what is called *psychological flexibility*. From this perspective it can be said that a restricted verbal repertoire hinders the rehabilitation process (Hayes et al. 2012).

The reading of literary fiction is assumed to be convenient for people with chronic non-cancer pain, since literary fiction constitutes a source of knowledge about human experiences (Felski 2008). Furthermore, readers of fiction perform imaginative and creative acts that align the reading of literary fiction with ACT theory. Fiction might be described as 'simulations' of the social world readers live in and can thus be compared to the 'real' world (Oatley 2016: 618).

Reading of literary fiction is a strategically chosen aesthetic activity. Furthermore, it is pleasurable. This is vital since it tends to facilitate readers' emotional involvement with the texts read (Felski 2008). Additionally, literary understanding is language-based and involves cognitive acts, such as perspective taking and perspective shifts, that are in line with the ACT rehabilitation programme, which aims at enriching people's language repertoires.

The present paper has a methodological focus. Drawing on discursive reception studies (Eriksson Barajas 2015), it aims to explore the usefulness of Judith Langer's theory of literary meaning making to analyse book talk in a SR chronic non-cancer pain context. Langer's key concepts *envisionment building* and *stances* (Langer 2011) will be used to trace instances of group members taking others' perspectives, such as those of literary characters or fellow group members. Given the impaired mentalization skills reported among people with chronic non-cancer pain such perspective taking during a SR session would align with one of the efforts in the rehabilitation programme that the participants have undergone: to promote psychological flexibility. This means being in touch with important life values, the ability to be in the here and now, and to seeing other perspectives than one's own and having an inflexible mindset (Hayes et al 2012).

Shared Reading as a Social and Literary Practice

Over the last two decades, a growing number of literature-related activities and cultural formations, allowing readers to share their interests and experiences with others, have developed. This sharing of reading ranges from so called *Mass Reading Events* such as Literature Festivals and Book Fairs to *One Book, One Community*-initiatives and reading groups, whether privately organised or by a library, whether televised as *Oprah's Book Club* (1996–2011) or online. According to Fuller and Rehberg Sedo in their *Reading Beyond the Book* (2012), this sharing of reading, or reading as a social practice, might be considered 'a way of building community and improving cross-cultural understanding', while still retaining the values usually ascribed to a traditional way of reading literature – i.e. silently and in privacy – such as its 'transformational, educational, therapeutic, creative, and even "civilizing" experience' (Fuller & Rehberg Sedo 2013:3).

The reading and literature promotion initiative *Shared Reading*, developed by British national charity The Reader, is in line with the above discussed tendency towards reading as a social practice. In Shared Reading (SR), groups of 8–12 people gather weekly with a licensed facilitator to read and discuss literary fiction and poetry for approximately 90 minutes. The selected reading material is typically language-rich and represents different genres such as short stories, poetry and extracts from novels.

The choice of serious or quality literature, instead of different kinds of self-help books or trade fiction, is based on the assumption that it 'offers a model of, and language for, human thinking and feeling with the potential to find and alleviate personal trouble and thus to promote therapeutic benefits'. Furthermore, SR is based on the hypothesis that literature has the capacity 'to put humans in touch with, and help them articulate, implicit and inchoate asepcts of personal experience' as well as 'the importance of having a language to express complex experiences as a means of tolerating and surviving it' (Dowrick, Billington, Robinson, Hamar & Williams 2013:38). While using the kind of literature that is traditionally acclaimed within higher education and Academia, SR means a repudiation from the academic, non-personal and theoretically informed critical reading. Consequently, the use of literature in a SR group is first and foremost personal and emotional. Thus, this way of reading aligns with the 'four modes of textual engagement' that Rita Felski describes in her *Uses of Literature* (2008). According to Felski, reading involves the 'logic of *recognition*; that aesthetic experience has analogies with *enchantment* in a supposedly disenchanted age; that literature creates distinctive configurations of social *knowledge*; that we may value the experience of being *shocked* by what we read' (Felski 2008:14). Members of SR groups are encouraged to jointly respond to literature in a personal way, combining cognitive and affective strategies.

Furthermore, the mission of SR is explicitly social, aiming to ’improve well-being, reduce social isolation and build resilience in diverse communities across the UK and beyond’ (The Reader 2018).

SR-group facilitators are trained by *The Reader*, which has pioneered SR in Britain and abroad. Facilitators are responsible for the selection of the texts, for reading texts aloud during SR-group sessions and for encouraging group members to share their immediate thoughts and personal feelings during reading or in pre-planned pauses. Group members are free to choose how they participate: by listening, by sharing their reactions to the text or by volunteering to read portions of the text aloud. No previous knowledge or homework is required. Today, The Reader weekly delivers around 500 reading groups in the UK, mainly in libraries and community settings or in health and care settings (hospitals, care homes, mental health units and addiction recovery centres) but also in prisons (The Reader 2018).

Previous Research

From a general point of view, previous research on Shared Reading in different settings is characterised by an affirmative outlook on the method and its outcomes. The bulk of this research has been carried out by the research group CRILS at the University of Liverpool, which has a strategic partnership with The Reader (CRILS 2018).

Over the years, CRILS researchers have identified and described ’intrinsic value elements’ (Longden, Davis, Carroll, Billington & Kinderman 2016:115) or ’catalysts for change’ (Dowrick et al 2012:15) to help explain recurrent positive experiences among people taking part in SR groups. The different value elements of SR singled out in previous research can be brought together under the following three headings: 1) literary form and content; 2) facilitation; 3) group processes.

Firstly, the serious or language-rich literature used in SR is reported to render group members feeling at ease when reading fiction. Poetry, on the other hand, tends to foster higher levels of concentration, since the shorter format makes it easier to ’go back to and repeat aloud words, phrases of lines in an effort to understand or mine for meaning’ (Dowrick et al 2012:17), resulting from challenging language use – e.g. metaphors and odd lineation – that asks its readers to think in novel ways. Fiction and poetry function as ’dynamically rich and complex’ models for thinking about a wide range of human experiences that cannot be ’readily resolved or ‘reasoned with’ ’ (Billington, Farrington, Lampropoulou, Lingwood, Jones, Ledson, McDonnell, Duirs, & Humphreys 2016a:10). Consequently, the texts read offer a ’personally meaningful language of emotion’ that might be picked up by SR group members who are identifying

with and trying to understand different experiences displayed in prose or poetry (Billington et al 2016a:8).

Secondly, the SR-group facilitators' expertise in literature is crucial since it enables them to choose texts that are suitable to the group. Furthermore, the facilitator must be a skillful reader while performing the text and thus securing its liveness during the SR session. Even more important, though, is the ability to create an atmosphere of mutual trust and confidence among group members in order to encourage live thinking, and to connect group members' thoughts and comments with one another as well as with the text read (Dowrick et al 2012:18).

Thirdly, in SR the group itself plays a crucial role in different respects. First and foremost, SR groups have an important social function by allowing the formation of relations between a wide range of people, thus potentially offering a 'relaxed and friendly environment' and 'a sense of community' (Hodge, Robinson & Davis 2007:102; Dowrick et al 2012:18–9; Billington et al 2016a:9). The social cohesion is also an outcome of the text being read aloud – with group members volunteering to read – thus contrasting most ordinary book clubs where almost no reading is carried out during the meetings. The (re)reading or performance of the text in a SR-group makes it *live*, which in its turn is reported to activate readers to a greater extent compared to ordinary silent reading (Longden et al 2015:115). Taking part in a joint aesthetic experience that stimulates concentration, members of a SR group may begin to articulate and develop thoughts and understanding while collectively trying to make sense of a language-rich text (Longden et al 2015:116). More often than not, text response is emotional, even though SR is not primarily intended for group-based discussions of personal problems. A wide range of human experiences embodied in texts may resonate with group members' own inner feelings, and this embodiment may create some distance thus making it easier to talk about one's own and other's feelings without explicitly referring to themselves (Longden et al 2015:116). On the condition that the SR group provides a safe place and a respectful atmosphere, group members take the opportunity to share personal memories and matters, e.g. 'autobiographical recollection' and 'memories of cruelty and humiliation' (Longden et al 2015:117), that may come to mind while reading and contemplating the text and listening to others. Furthermore, SR-group members report that during a session they might share personal matter that they so far have not shared with anyone else (Billington et al 2016a:6).

The Reader, who has developed SR and is now promoting SR in The UK as well as overseas, states that it 'exists to bring about a reading revolution, bringing great books to life by reading aloud, and modelling personal engagement with the text' Notwithstanding this literature promotion task, The Reader also aims at improving 'well-being, reduce social isolation and build resilience in diverse communities across the UK and beyond' (The Reader 2018). Since community

building is part of its objective, The Reader delivers shared reading not only in libraries, but also among vulnerable and non-experienced readers such as 'looked after children, people in recovery from substance mis-use, prisoners, individuals living with dementia, parents, teachers, people with mental and physical health conditions' (The Reader 2018). Even if the objective of SR, '[f]irst and foremost', is that group members meet with classical literature and respond to texts in a personal and emotional way, 'social or therapeutic benefits' are acknowledged in previous research, however 'secondary' they may be. A number of 'therapeutic dimensions' (Hodge et al 2007:103) are charted and described. Dowrick et al reports 'a reduction in depressive symptoms' among shared reading group members with a GP diagnosis of depression (Dowrick et al 2012:17). Questioning shared reading's explicit therapeutic 'usefulness' with reference to this being too medicalised a term, Longden et al on the other hand suggest that the health value of shared reading is of a more implicit kind. A joint aesthetic activity makes it possible for group members to experience new or 'changed mental processes' in the form of metacognition, i.e. the ability to experience and analyse one's own thinking (Longden et al 2015:118). In a small-scale study including 32 adults living with dementia, Longden et al report that shared reading 'is associated with a reduction of neuropsychiatric symptoms' and has a 'quantifiable impact on quality of life' (Longden et al 2016:80).

Two articles focus specifically on SR interventions among people with chronic non-cancer pain. Billington et al (2016b) reports a small-scale study with a group of six people running for 12 weeks. Using self-measure reports, one noticed 'some positive changes in terms of pain and psychological well-being' (Billington et al 2016b:20). Furthermore, participants report 'reduced awareness of pain during the group session' (Billington et al 2016b:24).

Billington et al (2016a) report a comparison between Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (5 weekly group sessions led by a therapist) and shared reading (22 weekly sessions with 10 people) as interventions among people in the chronic non-cancer pain context. The limited quantitative data show a decrease in their pain rating immediately after the SR session compared to the mean score two days before and after the session, which in turn was lower than the score two days prior to the session. In contrast to this, CBT had no effect on pain after the session. As evidenced by the Positive and Negative Affect Scale (PANAS), no changes in either group occurred, albeit a 'slightly higher positive PANAS scores and lower negative scores to occur in the SR group' (Billington et al 2016a:4). Qualitative data from video recordings of group sessions and audi-recorded interviews suggest that while conversation on personal matters in the CBT group focused on participants' problems and health issues, it displayed a greater variety in the SR-group since discussions and sharings of experiences was triggered by the texts read. Furthermore, in the latter group there was a greater focus on and acceptance

of the idea of *change* compared to in the CBT group, which the authors relate to the fact that literature encourages its readers to think about ’human situations from an imaginative position inside’ the poem or short story read (Billington et al 2016a:6–10).

To sum up: previous research has identified and described a number of beneficial outcomes in individuals who are part of SR groups, ranging from community building and well-being to a range of health improvements, brought about by the intrinsic value elements of SR as above mentioned. Furthermore, a variety of group processes, such as the reading aloud of texts and discussions on a range of human experiences thematized in texts read, have been singled out as one of the ’intrinsic value components’ paving the way for positive outcomes of SR.

The present paper offers a complementary view on the joint aesthetic experience – the group-based literary meaning-making process – in a SR group through an in-depth analysis of the joint negotiation of textual meaning. Previous research has shown that people with chronic non-cancer pain have an impaired capacity for *mentalisation*, i.e. the ability to understand others’ and one’s own mental state and the intentions and feelings behind behaviour (Zunhammer et al 2015). Hence, we are looking for instances in group discussions where participants collectively are engaging in understanding actions, experiences and motives of literary characters as well as those of fellow group members, i.e. taking perspectives other than their own.

Theory

This paper reports what Peplow, Swann, Trimarco & Whiteley term a *naturalistic* reading study with ’contextualised reading practices, involving readers engaged in habitual reading environments and behaviors who have read whole texts and are able to interact freely with others’ (Peplow et al 2016:5). We adopt a sociocultural approach to reading and literary meaning-making emphasising the ’socially and culturally situated nature of reading’ (Peplow et al, 2016: 8).

According to Eriksson Barajas (2015), research on literary reception in a group setting has mainly considered single respondents’ separate answers or views on textual meaning. Drawing on discursive psychology (Edwards & Potter 1992), Eriksson Barajas argues for the importance of considering how literary understanding in a such a group setting is rooted in and given words in the conversation among its participants through a ’shared reading’ (Eriksson Barajas 2015:4). Discursive psychology aims at an understanding of ’conversation practices’ that take place regardless of the research carried out, thus contrasting experiments or interviews, focusing on ’interactional resources and sequential practices as well as the discourses utilized by participants’. Furthermore, an emphasis is placed on group members’ ’uptake of and orientation toward prior positioning in conversations’ (Eriksson Barajas 2015:5). According to Eriksson

Barajas, the basic research question of discursive psychology – *'How is X done'* – might be applied to book-talk in a group setting. Hence, the interactions are the objects of interpretation, leaving possible' "inner reasons" or motives' aside (Eriksson Barajas 2015:10). Studying group discussions of literature as interaction makes it possible to understand not only a single individual's understanding of a text, but also the role of social interaction among group members for literary meaning making (Eriksson Barajas 2015:11).

Method

Data to be analysed consist of video-recordings from a pilot study for the above-mentioned project SHARP with one SR group made up of four women with chronic non-cancer pain. The group met once a week over eight weeks, and the number of participants ranged between 2 and 4. Ethical approval has been granted by The Regional Ethical Review Board, Lund, Sweden (Ref. nr 2017/517).

The analysis will focus on two extracts from the conversation in a SR session with three group members and one facilitator reading and discussing Danish author Ida Jessen's short story 'An Outing' [En udflugt] from her collection *Postcard to Annie* [Postkort til Annie] published in 2013. This short story is set in the countryside of contemporary Denmark. The main female character Tove is making her living renovating furniture. However, she also has artistic ambitions, and she is dreaming of a future as a textile designer. Tove is in a problematic relationship with her partner named Max, who is somewhat snobbish. Furthermore, he does not hesitate to impose his will on her.

The spoken interaction has been transcribed verbatim, leaving out features of written discourse such as punctuation. The transcription follows Peplow et al. (2016:195) and the following features will be used:

Transcription feature	*Meaning*
(.)	brief pause
[talking about overlapping	square brackets mark the beginning of
[but not the facts	speech
[…]	excision – part of longer transcript omitted

Two extracts from the conversation will be analysed using concepts from Judith Langer's theory of literary meaning making. This theory is firmly rooted in reader-response criticism and hermeneutics. It aims at describing and promoting the 'kinds of *thinking* [italics here] a person does when reading' (Langer 2011:9) and it has been developed through empirical studies of 'students' participation in regular class-work and their think-aloud comments' (Langer 2011:25). This

makes the theory and its two key concepts – *envisionment building* and *stances* – promising for studying the joint meaning making process in a SR-group.

Envisionment refers to the understanding of different aspects of a text – cognitive as well as emotional – that a reader has at 'a given point in time', including that which has been grasped as well as that which still remains confusing. Basically, envisionments are the outcome of sense-making. Furthermore, envisionments are dynamic and open to change since reading equals paving one's way through a text-world. During this process new textual information or other readers' responses might bring about change in the envisionment: what seemed to be important might need to be revised. Reading and understanding, therefore, can be described as envisionment *building*: 'Envisionments grow and change and become enriched over time'. Additionally, envisionments are individual snapshots, dependent on readers' 'personal and cultural experiences' (Langer 2011:10–11).

Langer uses the concept *stance* to describe the different options or strategies readers may use when they interact with a certain text and develop their envisionment. Stance refers to the knowledge or the different 'vantage points' available for readers' envisionment building. Langer distinguishes and describes five stances. These are not linear, but may be used any time during the reading and meaning-making process (Langer 2011:16–7).

Stance 1. *Being Outside and Stepping into an Envisionment*
This stance refers to readers' efforts to 'step into an envisionment', i.e. to gather as much information as possible to understand what the work might be about and form a first impression of textual elements such as plot, character, setting and time. At this point, any clue is considered and matched with readers' experiences and knowledge. The first stance is typically used at the outset of the envisionment building, but may also occur later when readers 'become derailed' (Langer 2011:17) from the envisionment.

Stance 2. *Being Inside and Moving Through an Envisionment*
In stance 2, readers are 'immersed' in the envisionment, using personal knowledge and new information to develop and modify their understanding of what the poem or story is all about. The aim is to move beyond what is already known by making connections between elements in or parts of the text and asking 'questions about motives, feelings, causes, interrelationships, and implications' (Langer 2011:18).

Stance 3. *Stepping Out and Rethinking What You Know*
This stance refers to a shift in readers' focus. Instead of trying to better understand a text-world, readers here distance themselves from the envisionment. From this

external perspective they reflect on it, e.g. its core thematic content or ideology, its characters and their actions. Consequently, envisionments are used to ’reflect on something that we knew or did or felt before having read the text’ (Langer 2011:19). The third stance is an important reason for reading literature since it ’provides us with a set of mirrors with which to view our own accomplishments and imagine alternative values, beliefs, and emotions’ (Langer 2011:20).

Stance 4. S*tepping Out and Objectifying the Experience*
In this stance, readers distance themselves from their envisionment. But unlike in stance 3, the focus is here still on the text-world. Readers take up the role as a literary critic, using an analytical gaze to comment on textual elements, literary devices or intertextual connections. Furthermore, they might bring a certain theoretical perspective to the fore in order to deepen their interpretation.

Stance 5. *Leaving an Envisonment and Going Beyond*
This stance is less used than the others, since it refers to moments when readers make use of already ’well-developed envisionments’ (Langer 2011:21) – i.e. works that readers are already very well familiar with – when engaged in another envisionment building.

To sum up: stances drive envisionment building. They are not linear but might recur at any time during the reading and meaning-making process. Furthmore, as Langer points out, the five stances are interconnected. They are options or strategies for readers to use while interpreting literature: ’In the first two stances, our thoughts are on our envisionments themselves. In the third, our thoughts are on our experience and knowledge of the real world. In the fourth, we objectify our envisionments, holding them apart for inspection. And in the fifth stance we step away from our envisionments, often moving into an entirely new envisionment’ (Langer 2011:21).

Analysis
Two extracts from the conversation on Jessen’s short story will be analysed. The first conversation takes place when the group has read and discussed two thirds of the text. By then, the main character Tove has left her home in anger and her partner Max is likely to show up soon. She has put a number of raw herrings on the sink, very well aware of the fact that Max doesn’t like that kind of fish. Now, she is cycling to a nearby village just to get away from home. Tove decides to go to a restaurant, where she orders herring. A fellow guest, who has joined Tove sitting alone, says: ’The herrings are very tasty here. Hard fried, exactly as they should be.’ (Jessen 2013:40) At this point, the facilitator makes a break in the reading and the following conversation takes place:

Extract 1

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1. L: I'm thinking like this (.) it is about herring, right she had thrown
2. those herrings on the table
3. J: ah yes
4. L: he had written a note saying that he is out driving (.) presumably
5. [they have had a quarrel about herring
6. J: [elegant
7. L: she took herring out of the fridge and put it on
8. [his note
9. J: [yes
10. L: or on her own note as a protest (.) then she went back in crumpled
11. up the note but left the herring on the table (.) so in order to tease
12. him both because it was lying there because it was herring and
13. there were stains (.) so there is something with the
14. **[**herring as such
15. J: [mmm
16. L: she is staging some kind of protest see (.) they have probably
17. beenquarreling about something that I am not quite understanding
18. right now
19. J: that was a nice connection really
20. C: yes
21. J: it will be exciting to see if it [the herring] will show up later on

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Note: L= Lydia; J = June; C = Claire (facilitator is silent)

To begin with (line 1–8), the dish – herring – that Tove orders in the restaurant catches L's attention. From the very beginning of the conversation, she and her fellow group members consider the possibility that a special meaning might be assigned to this particular fish. The conversation starts by group members placing themselves in stance 2: they are jointly speculating on the meaning of the herring with L taking a leading role. She brings previous information to the fore (line 4–5), more specifically from the very beginning of the short story. Here, Tove is about to leave in order to cycle to the nearby village. But before that, she writes a message to Max stating that it obvious to her that he dislikes herring and that 'she is not some fucking house-wife' (Jessen 2013:7; our translation). Furthermore, on

the top of the note she places a bagful of raw herring. L's conclusion that 'presumably, they have had a quarrel about herring', seems reasonable. Even if L is the one who makes these connections between different passages of the text, the support from J in lines 3, 6 and 8 is important and possibly helps L develop her understanding.

In the next part of the conversation (line 12–15), group members are still in stance 2. They are making their envisionment richer. Once again, L is the most active group member. She is using earlier information to go beyond what she and the rest of the group know. According to L, Tove is deliberately trying to upset Max (line 12–14), even if she decides not to let him read the note. To the readers of the short story, however, this is useful information, but obviously not needed for making Max upset, since Tove decides to throw the note away before leaving.

Finally, at this point of the discussion, L is referring to the herring 'as such' (line 14). She is distancing herself from the envisionment, pondering over the function of the herring in the story. To her, this is not just any food or fish. L suggests that its meaning goes beyond that of an ordinary object in the fictional world. According to L, Tove is using the herring to stage 'some kind of protest'. Even if L doesn't use the concept 'symbol', one might conclude that she is aiming at such an understanding of the role of this particular kind of fish. J, who has already offered L her support, once again agrees with this tentative symbolic interpretation of the herring. First, she once again supports L's connection between this passage of the text with the opening of the short story. Then, in line 21 she speculates about 'it [the herring] will show up later on', thus agreeing with L's view of the herring as some kind of symbol.

At the end of the conversation cited above, the group takes a different stance to the envisionment compared to at the beginning of the extract. Here they are, in Langer's words, 'seeing the text and meaning from distance' using a more 'analytical outlook'. The group uses stance 4, i.e. group members are 'Stepping Out and Objectifying the Experience', as they focus on 'the author's craft' and how the work 'is put together' (Langer 2011: 20–1).

The second extract to be analysed stems from the end of the reading of and conversation on Jessen's short story. At this point, it is obvious that even though Tove is very well aware of Max's bad influence on her by way of his effort to remake her and to change her habits, she needs the hope that he instills in her. Immediately before the extract below, J, making things somewhat more complicated, says that Tove seems to have had some really good moments with Max, too. L disagrees:

Extract 2

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1. L: I go totally nuts when I think of this […]
2. L: but anyway (.) she is changing
3. [because of
4. C: [mmm…
5. L: of him she is kind of ruining herself since he always has the power
6. [to reshape her
7. C/L: [mmm
8. C: it feels like this need to be loved by someone to be living together **9**. with someone is the most important thing […] instead of living **10**. on your own and having a good life until one finally meets
11. someone together with whom one can have a good life

Note: L= Lydia; C = Claire (facilitator and J = June are silent)

Still very active, L is initially quite upset saying that she goes 'totally nuts' (line 1). At this point a shift of perspective or focus is taking place. Once again, a group member has stepped out of her envisionment. She has taken a stance that enables her to consider the text from an external perspective. But instead of objectifying the reading experience by focusing on the structure of the text, i.e. stance 4, she steps out of the envisionment to state her opinion on the relation between Tove and Max. L's line – 'I go totally nuts when I'm thinking of this' – is uttered from a text-external vantage point. She states her own opinion on the meaning developed during the envision-building process. Consequently, L positions herself in stance 3. Here, we, as readers, according to Langer, 'allow our developing understandings, our text-worlds, to add to our own knowledge and experiences [- - -] moving from the text-world that we are creating to what those ideas mean for our own lives, ideas, or knowledge' (Langer 2011:19). Obviously, L's understanding of the relation between Tove and Max triggers her to dissociate herself from Tove's submissiveness: 'she is kind of ruining herself since he always has the power to reshape her' (L 5–6). Following Langer, we might conclude that L is using the envisionment to come up with something that she 'knew or did or felt before having read the text' (Langer 2011:19). Obviously, the text-world is reflecting back on her opinions and feelings, possibly grounded in her own experiences. This is an instance of the 'reciprocity between our fictive and real worlds', that is typical for stance 3 according to Langer: 'The

envisionments illuminate (and influence) life, and life illuminates (and influences) the envisionment' (Langer 2011:19).

While L positions herself in relation to the envisionment, the other group members once again agree, humming 'Mmm'. This support is likely important to L while she is about to articulate her personal view of the text meaning. No wonder then that C herself, inspired by L, also reacts to the relationship between Tove and Max from a position outside the envisionment: stance 3. In line 8, C distances herself from the ideology of the text: the importance of having a relationship, no matter what it is like. She is using the envisionment as a kind of mirror allowing her, in Langer's words, to 'imagine alternative values, beliefs, and emotions' (Langer 2011:20). Furthermore, in lines 9–11, C takes the opportunity to state her own opinion on these matters, and on the possibility of living 'a good life' on your own without a partner. C's and L's comments are instances of readers using literature to display their own beliefs and values.

Conclusion and Discussion

Two transcripts from a SR group conversation have been analysed using Langer's concepts envisionment building and stance. Drawing on discursive reception studies, the analysis has considered the conversation in total even when single sentences or words are commented on. The analysis has attested to the basic assumption in discursive psychology that stresses the importance of considering the role of interaction among group members for literary meaning making (Eriksson Barajas 2015:11). Productive envisionment building in a SR group, like in any literary meaning-making process, requires its members to be able to move out of their own perspectives to consider others', i.e. the perspectives of the literary text or the character's. Such shifts of perspectives are facilitated by the group's joint meaning-making process.

Instances of perspective taking as well as perspective shifts have been discerned in the two above analysed transcripts. In the first one, L is trying to understand main character Tove's motive for placing the herring on the sink by presuming that a quarrel between her and Max might have occurred earlier. L is making an effort to take *Tove's perspective* in order to understand her action. Then L takes another perspective: she is moving out of the envisionment and of Tove's mind, to consider the role of the herring from *a structural perspective* like that of a literary critic. Even if L is the most active group member, other members are constantly supportive in different respects. To be able to offer their support, however, they, in their turn, need to take both *L's perspective* and that *of Tove and the structural one*.

Further instances of perspective taking are found in the second transcript. Before L is able to condemn the relation between Tove and Max from an *external perspective*, she must have considered Tove's way of acting. She has moved from

an understanding of the envisionment to a position where she is articulating her own view.

Towards the end of the second transcript, after having taken a supportive role, C explicitly states her own view. After having initially *considered L's perspective* she is offering L her support. Then C herself *takes the perspective of Tove* and observes her 'need to be loved'. Thereafter she *moves out of Tove's perspective*, stating her own view, i.e. that it is possible to live a good life without a partner.

Taken together, these examples attest to the observation in previous research (Billington 2016a:8) that language-rich texts or literary fiction offer models for serious thinking and discussion of human experiences while resonating with group members' needs. As suggested by Langer, literature should not primarily be regarded as a certain text type, but as a 'way of thinking' (Langer 2011:2). Readers' building of envisionments imply interaction with literary texts, and envisionments encompass 'what the individual thinks, feels, and senses – sometimes knowingly, often tacitly' (Langer 2011:15). Literary meaning making presupposes readers' active envolvement while using their own experiences as well as others'.

Langer's concept of stance, which has been developed to understand and promote *literary thinking*, is a promising tool for the identification, description and analysis of group members' strategies while trying to make sense of Jessen's short story. The analysis has identified the use of three of the five stances, namely stance 2, 3 and 4. This comes as no surprise since the transcripts stem from the latter part of a book-talk, where the use of stance 1 typically is rare.

Group members have jointly used different stances. The transcripts display recurrent instances of group members offering each other mutual support while engaged in envisionment building, which is also reported in previous research (Hodge et al 2007:102; Dowrick 2012:18–9; Billington 2016a:9).

While reading and talking about literature, group members have been able to perform acts of mentalisation, i.e. understanding mental acts of literary characters as well as fellow group members. Obviously, people living with chronic non-cancer pain are able to perform acts of perspective-taking and perspective shifts during a shared-reading session, i.e. some of the mental processes aimed at in the ACT-based rehabilitation programme that they have previously undergone. This supports the position of SR within SHARP as an add-on intervention to already existing rehabilitation efforts and not as an alternative like in previous studies (Billington et al 2016a).

Further studies considering the use of Langer's concepts envisionment building and stance for describing and analysing literary meaning-making in SR-groups might focus on the distribution and frequency of the five stances. Another question to be explored is what or who brings about shifts of perspective. To what extent can a facilitator promote readers' perspective shifts? The perspective also

needs to be broadened e.g. by integrating analytical perspectives from discursive psychology and linguistics.

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