A brief reference to popular culture led to momentary disruption of the norms, roles, and discourse customary in Ms. Leigh’s (all teacher and student names are pseudonyms) Year 5 classroom. This event took place in a January literacy lesson, in the middle of a unit on writing short stories about a storm. Prior to this lesson the students wrote first drafts of “timed stories” (written under conditions of limited time to simulate the national tests), which Ms. Leigh assessed, providing students with their assessment levels and targets for improvement. The students then redrafted their stories. In the lesson we discuss here, they shared their targets, after which one student, Harry, read out loud his first draft. Ms. Leigh then announced, “We’re going to be your judges now. So we’re going to have X Factor. We’re going to decide marks out of 10 for how much Harry has improved in the second version of his story.”

Ms. Leigh’s reference to the televised talent show X Factor (U.K. counterpart of American Idol) was received by a number of students with enthusiastic exclamations. William raised his arms above his head in the trademark “X” sign and hummed the show’s theme tune. Harry removed his jumper, readying himself for the contest.

This was the first time Ms. Leigh had introduced X Factor into her classroom, and we were intrigued by students’ immediate and positive responses to the mere mention of the televised talent show. This article examines closely how the episode unfolded, asking, How, if at all, did the X Factor discourse genre bear upon teaching and learning practices in this classroom? What social, discursive and pedagogical possibilities did it open up or close down? How were these possibilities taken up and managed by participants?

In recent years enthusiasm for the pedagogical and social potential of the mixing of popular culture with school-based discourse genres has grown. We use this X Factor episode as an opportunity to explore the alleged advantages and complexities of such discourse.
genre heterogeneity. Although the incorporation of X Factor led to heightened student involvement and fundamental changes in patterns of student participation, its effects on opportunities for student learning were mixed. We argue that the same discursive resources that make popular culture attractive as a means of motivating students to engage in classroom activity may in some cases be counterproductive for meaningful and substantive academic learning. Our discussion of the event also highlights the dynamics through which teacher and students co-construct discourse genre mixing, and methodological issues about how this phenomenon can and should be studied. We begin by framing the study theoretically with discussions of discourse genre and research on popular culture in classrooms.

Outline of a Theory of Discourse Genres

Genre is a relatively fuzzy concept, used in multiple ways and for a variety of purposes in different research traditions. Our use of the term is inspired primarily by Bakhtin (1981, 1986), and the way his concept of speech genre has been taken up in linguistic anthropology (e.g., Briggs & Bauman, 1992; Hanks, 1987, 1996) and linguistic ethnography (e.g., Maybin, 2006; Rampton, 2006). At the heart of this approach to genre is the idea that in different spheres of social activity recurring situations give rise to relatively stable ways of using language and interacting. These relatively stable ways of communicating, or discourse genres, serve both as resources for fashioning utterances and as constraints upon the way those utterances are understood and judged by others.

**Discourse genres encompass multiple social and semiotic dimensions.** These include thematic content, compositional structure, styles, lexical items, interactional roles and norms, interpersonal relations, and evaluative frames, among others. An English Year 5 literacy lesson, for example, has recognizable topics (e.g., writing short stories), sequential structures (e.g., the four-part literacy hour framework, the initiation-response-evaluation structure), roles (teacher and student), interactional norms (e.g., governing who can speak when, movement, posture, dress code) and evaluative criteria (e.g., national curriculum assessment standards). This is a partial list; we offer a more detailed characterization of a literacy lesson genre in a later section of this article. Evoking one dimension of a genre calls to mind the other dimensions, and invites participants to think about an utterance or social situation in terms of the genre evoked (cf. Bakhtin, 1981).

**Discourse is generically structured at multiple levels.** Communicative activity can be examined at different levels and time scales: For example, school-based educational activity might be analyzed at the level of a six-week curriculum unit (e.g., writing short stories), an hour-long lesson (e.g., on opening the story), an activity or task (e.g., class feedback on an individual student’s story opening), an exchange (e.g., one initiation-response-evaluation cycle), or an utterance (e.g., a written or spoken student answer). Activity is generically organized at each of these levels, and it is important to examine how the different genres invoked at each level interact with one another.

**Genre and context are mutually constitutive.** Contexts of activity frame participants’ expectations about what genres might be relevant: For example, an utterance will be identified as a “joke” more readily in a stand-up comedy routine than in a religious sermon. Conversely, participants signal to one another the relevant context of activity through manipulation of generic features: telling a string of jokes in a “sermon,” or preaching by a comedian may transform participants’ interpretation of the social situation. Moreover, because genres are constituted by recurrent semiotic activity in similar social situations, such stretching (or breaking) of genre conventions can transform the cultural model of the genre itself.

**Genres leak.** The preceding examples point to the imperfect fit between some ideal, prototypical notion of a genre and its realization in practice, which gives rise to an intertextual gap (Briggs & Bauman, 1992). Such gaps arise from individual creativity and agency, from ambiguities or complexities in social situations, from social and generic change, and from the inherent blurriness of genres as overlapping and incomplete categories in flux.

Gaps between text and genre are filled with materials from other genres, thereby creating mixed, hybrid, or complex genres (genres within genres). Such mixing of genres can be, as Kress (2003) wrote, “somewhat of a theoretical embarrassment...if all genres are mixed genres—as I suggested earlier—what is a ‘genre’, a pure genre; how and where would it occur; and how would we recognise it?” (p. 118; see also pp. 87–88). Our response to this problem is twofold. First, the fuzziness of genre categories reflects the intricate and ambiguous social situations from which genres arise and in which they are employed. It makes little sense to hold genres to stricter rules of logical classification than we apply to those social situations. Second, it is more productive to think about texts as participating in rather than belonging to genres (Derrida, 1980); in other words, making sense of texts is an active process of making connections between text and possible genres, rather than sorting texts into categories (cf. Kamberelis, 1995). Such an approach focuses on genre as dynamic, enacted process rather than static, formal category.

**Genres are sites of political and ideological contestation.** Genres encapsulate worldviews, value systems,
and ideologies: “Because people in groups develop genres, genres reflect what the group believes and how it views the world” (Devitt, 2008, p. 59). Consequently, genres are closely linked to the power relations and social structures of the field in which they are employed. Different situations require that people speak and act in certain ways in accordance with their social position. Actors adapt their discourse to these expectations to maximize its reception or to “signal the authentic, authoritative grounds on which they speak” (see Hanks, 1996, p. 244, on “regularisation” and “officialisation”).

Because of their ideological associations and implication in social structures, genres are sites of contestation, regimentation, and resistance. So, for example, part of maintaining discipline in schools is ensuring that students (and teachers) adhere to normative classroom discourse genres. Conversely, one way of breaking out of the student (or teacher) role is by introducing other discourse genres into the classroom. Inasmuch as social spheres are more or less regimented, discourse within them is more or less policed, and genre conventions are treated more or less rigidly. Hence, for example, communication via Home Office application forms is much more tightly controlled than literacy teaching, which is more strictly governed than small talk at a social gathering. Mixing discourse genres tends to be more dangerous in more highly regimented social situations.

Finally, we should note that, depending on the situation, some genres are more valuable (i.e., prestigious, useful) than others, and that access to genres is not evenly distributed. An individual’s capacity to draw upon generic resources is shaped by their linguistic and cultural knowledge, their habitus (i.e., embodied dispositions that make participation in some genres easier and more “natural” than others), and their social position (e.g., a lay person who is able to perfectly imitate a priest’s language and actions nevertheless lacks the authority to conduct mass).

Enthusiasm for Mixing Academic and Popular Culture Discourse Genres

The phenomenon whereby school-based discourse genres intermix with everyday and popular culture genres—or discourse genre “heterogeneity,” “hybridity,” or “weaving,” to mention other terms used in this regard—has received considerable attention in educational research in recent years (e.g., Barton & Tan, 2009; Gaztambide-Fernandez & Gruner, 2003; Gebhard, 2005; Gutiérrez, 2008; Harklau & Zuengler, 2003; Juzwik, 2004; Marsh, 2008; Moje et al., 2004; Pahl & Kelly, 2005). In this section we outline some of the key ideas and issues discussed in this research literature, attending in particular to the alleged advantages of importing popular culture into the classroom, key questions raised, and the contribution of this article to the field.

In a recent review, Marsh (2008) noted that “research in this field [of popular culture in education] has been concerned to establish the ideological rationale for the inclusion of popular culture within literacy curricula” (p. 530). She identified four main lines of argument, or models, which we adapt and build upon in mapping the field.3

1. Instrumental Models. The starting point here is the observation that young people enthusiastically immerse themselves in popular culture, mastering quickly new technologies and fields. Buckingham (2003) noted the “extraordinary contrast between the high levels of activity that characterise children’s consumer cultures and the passivity that increasingly suffuses their schooling” (p. 313). Proponents of instrumental models hope to bring some of students’ passion and energy for popular culture into the classroom through incorporation of popular culture texts into the curriculum. In short, they hope to use popular culture as a means of pressing students’ interests into the service of the official literacy curriculum.

2. Cultural Capital Models. Linguistic and other cultural resources valued in the school setting are not equally distributed: disenfranchised students tend to be the sons and daughters of socioeconomically disadvantaged or culturally marginalized parents. Students who do not feel at home in school-based discourse genres, and who do not see the curriculum as relevant to their own lives, are likely to feel alienated from school (cf. Rymes, 2003, on the “zone of comfortable competence”). Proponents of cultural capital models are concerned with bridging the gap between the funds of knowledge (cf. Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992) students bring with them from home and the relatively specialized discourse genres and knowledge they encounter in school. One way of bridging everyday and academic knowledge is to “weave” (Kwek, in press; Luke, Kwek, & Cazden, 2006) them together in classroom discourse. In such a way, students are encouraged to use everyday experiences to make sense of and build academic knowledge, and moreover to see the potential relevance of school knowledge to their everyday lives (Teo, 2008; see also Barnes, 1976, on school knowledge versus action knowledge).

3. Critical Models. The chief concern in these models is to counteract, or at least weaken, the influence of schooling and the official curriculum in social reproduction. Proponents of critical models argue that schools are “a particular way of life organized to produce and legitimate either the economic and political interests of business elites or the privileged cultural
capital of the ruling-class groups” (Giroux & Simon, 1988, p. 10). Accordingly, the very exclusion of popular culture from school—and its designation as “popular” (as opposed to “high”) culture—is seen, in and of itself, as a key problem that educators must address. In this approach, “schools are sites of struggle and...pedagogy [is] a form of cultural politics” (Giroux & Simon, 1988, p. 10). Such a politics dictates inclusion of popular culture in the official curriculum, and adoption of a critical stance toward popular culture, traditional canonical texts, and the distinction between them.

4. “Third Space” Models. Whereas the other approaches seek to bring students closer to school discourse and knowledge (instrumental models), bring school knowledge closer to students’ lives (critical models) or a combination of both (cultural capital models), third space models seek to create new, hybrid discourse genres that pose possibilities for the expansion and transformation of existing knowledge, identities, and power relations. Gutiérrez, Rymes, and Larson (1995) characterized classroom discourse in an urban U.S. secondary school as consisting of two separate and simultaneous social spaces, inhabited by two distinct “scripts” (discourse genres), that rarely intersect: the official script of the teacher and curriculum and the counterscript of (some) students and popular culture. Occasionally, an unscripted “third space” opens up, in which “students and teachers can bridge the various social spaces within classrooms...create[ing] the potential to rewrite and contest extant texts and discursive practices...to redefine what counts as knowledge” (p. 467). In subsequent work, Gutiérrez, Baquedano-Lopez, Alvarez, and Chiu (1999) have actively facilitated the creation of third spaces, emphasizing also their potential role in participants’ social and cognitive development (Gutiérrez, 2008; see also Barton & Tan, 2009; Kamberelis, 2001).

For the reasons outlined, enthusiasm for mixing school and popular culture discourse genres is widespread. Indeed, most research in the field has been devoted to arguing for or demonstrating the educational and emancipatory potential of importing popular culture into classrooms. In celebrating the phenomenon, however, we risk losing sight of its complexities and potential problems. It is to these complexities that we turn in our analysis, building on studies that have highlighted the limitations of bringing popular culture into the classroom.

For example, Moss (2000) questioned the very possibility of inserting popular culture into the school curriculum. Building on Bernstein’s (1996) distinction between vertical and horizontal discourses, Moss (2000) drew attention to the conflicts that arise when popular texts (e.g., horror movies or teen fiction) are taken out of their social and discursive context and recontextualized in an official domain. Knowledge of the conventions of a horror movie may afford a child status when interacting with peers outside of school (e.g., at a sleepover), but such knowledge lacks social currency in the classroom, where the freedom and intimacy of a social gathering (and its associated social relations, forms of dress, codes of conduct, etc.) are replaced by institutional rules and formality. Moss’s analysis draws attention to the ways in which the broader social and institutional contexts of schooling constrain and direct classroom activity, and how such forces are likely to regiment the mixing of discourse genres.

Another exception to the general enthusiasm is Duff (2003), who demonstrated how the infusion of popular culture into linguistically and culturally diverse secondary school classrooms in Canada marginalized some students even while benefiting others. Her analysis problematizes key advantages that we have already reviewed: Discourse genre mixing may shift power relations, but who is empowered or disempowered? It may bridge funds of knowledge, but how helpful are the new understandings it facilitates? It may challenge official discourses, but how legitimate and productive are those challenges?

This article explores these questions through close examination of one episode of popular culture and academic discourse genre mixing. Analysis of this episode further problematizes the proposition that teachers should incorporate popular culture into the classroom—not necessarily arguing that it is a bad idea, rather that the issue is more complicated than is usually acknowledged. We suggest that to account adequately for this phenomenon we need ways of seeing and discussing the diverse configurations of genre interaction that go beyond the binary categories of complete separation (e.g., script and counterscript) vs. integrative third-space hybridity. In what follows we develop a framework for analyzing discourse genres, investigate their intermixing in classroom interaction, and point to pedagogical implications of this analysis.

Research Context and Method

The episode investigated in this article is drawn from an extended case study (cf. Burawoy, 1998) of processes of continuity and change in classroom interaction. Data collection involved observation and videotaping of 73 literacy lessons in seven upper primary classrooms and a professional development intervention designed to encourage and support dialogic pedagogy, defined broadly as “a pedagogy that exploits the power of talk to engage and shape children’s thinking and learning, and to secure and enhance their understanding” (Alexander, 2008, p. 92). In this article we focus on one lesson from the corpus of data. In what follows, we
briefly describe the research site; discuss case selection, including situating the focal episode within our overall corpus; and elaborate the methods employed in analyzing the focal episode.

**Research Site: Abbeyford Primary School**

Abbeyford (a pseudonym) is a relatively large community primary school in East London, England. We chose to work in this area because the Local Authority has a long-standing interest in dialogic pedagogy and a history of developing and implementing pedagogical innovations. A senior Local Authority advisor recommended Abbeyford Primary on account of its highly regarded, stable, and experienced teaching staff and leadership team. Furthermore, the staff had positive experiences in a previous intervention and were keen to experiment with their practice.

Abbeyford Primary is located in a borough with a low socioeconomic profile, though the school is on a relatively more affluent edge of the borough, and is attended also by students from a neighboring authority. The majority of the students in the school come from white working class backgrounds. Although the school has until recently been among the higher achieving schools in the Local Authority, as reflected in standardized test scores, its position has slipped in the past few years. For example, Abbeyford was ranked 5th out of 35 schools in the “league tables” comparing local schools in 2006, but fell to 29th in 2009. School management and teachers were under considerable pressure to reverse this downward trend, and success in the standardized assessments task (SAT) tests and the upcoming governmental inspection were a major concern for all.

Ms. Leigh, the teacher appearing in this article, had been teaching for 11 years and also served as assistant head teacher and literacy coordinator. She was recognized by the Local Authority as a leading teacher for the purposes of filming exemplary lessons. Likewise, we held her in very high regard, as a highly motivated and reflective teacher who artfully draws her students into meaningful literacy practices while at the same time satisfying national curriculum requirements. Over a nine-month period, we visited Ms. Leigh’s classroom 13 times. Her lessons were always interesting and enjoyable, and often innovative in their integration of music, visual aids, noncurricular texts, and dramatic performance with the official curriculum. It is unfortunate that the positive emotional tenor of her classroom cannot be adequately captured in the transcripts or even video recordings. Although we do voice some criticisms of teaching in the episode analyzed in this article, we would like to emphasize that (a) most of the issues we raise are rooted in the broader policy environment in which Ms. Leigh works and against the boundaries of which she is pushing, and (b) Ms. Leigh was herself critical of many of these practices in discussions about the episode with us and with the other teachers.

**Case Selection: The X Factor Episode**

Throughout the fieldwork we selected episodes that highlighted issues related to dialogic pedagogy or interactional change for use in stimulating individual and group feedback discussions with the participating teachers. The lesson examined in this article was among those selected, in the first instance, as basis for a one-to-one feedback conversation with Ms. Leigh in mid-March 2009; 10 weeks later, the X Factor episode was discussed in a session with all seven participating teachers.

We were drawn to this episode for a number of reasons. First, it represents relatively positive practice—for example, students are actively engaged, authority is decentralized (without loss of control), and multiple perspectives on story writing are drawn out in the discussion—yet also poses pedagogical problems from which the teachers can learn (e.g., how to shift from specific focus and feedback on one student’s work to general principles and insights relevant to the entire class). Second, the extract captures well a set of issues related to evaluations of student writing, which had repeatedly emerged in our field notes, and which we wished to investigate with the teachers. Third, the episode displays significant shifts in interactional patterns, including high incidences of extended student utterances and student–student exchanges (not directly mediated by the teacher). Finally, we were interested in exploring with the teachers the hypothesis that importing discourse genres from outside of school can be an effective way of changing classroom interactional norms.

Subsequent systematic discourse analysis confirms the critical nature of this episode with regard to shifts in interactional patterns. Table 1 compares the episode with the rest of a corpus of 10 of Ms. Leigh’s lessons, with the school average (based on 30 lessons in three teachers’ classrooms), and with a national sample with regard to the rate of eight key discourse moves (i.e., average number of discourse moves per hour) and the levels of student participation (in terms of average length and overall duration of student moves).

Readers will note that the X Factor episode stands out against other episodes in the corpus in relation to key structural indicators of dialogic interaction. Relative to the rest of the corpus of Ms. Leigh’s lessons, the episode exhibits a high proportion of student questions (a rate of 30 per hour, compared with an average of 5); over twice as many open questions (i.e., questions for which there is no single correct response) and many fewer closed (or “test”) questions; less frequent evaluation of student responses, and the feedback Ms. Leigh does give is elaborated (i.e., involves an extended response); and a high
rate of students’ responding directly to one another (113 per hour, compared with an average of 11).

Not only does the focal episode stand out as a relatively dialogic spell (Nystrand, Wu, Gamoran, Zeiser, & Long, 2003), but also it is conspicuous as the most sustained use of popular culture in the corpus of Ms. Leigh’s lessons. Though it was not unusual for Ms. Leigh to refer to television shows, music, novels, and her own personal experiences of these in her explanations, her references were mostly fleeting. The X Factor episode is the only case in the corpus in which Ms. Leigh (or indeed any of the participating teachers) built this kind of reference into an extended activity, and as such, it caught our attention, especially in light of the shift in interactional patterns. Therefore, this episode poses a critical case for exploring the theoretical approaches to discourse genres and popular culture in the classroom that we have outlined: an instance “where the concatenation of events is so idiosyncratic as to throw into sharp relief the principles underlying them” (Mitchell, 2006, p. 37).

### Analytic Frame

The methodological frame for analysis of data in this study is linguistic ethnography, an emerging school in social science in the United Kingdom that seeks to integrate ethnography’s openness and holism (among other advantages) with the insights and rigor of linguistics (Rampton et al., 2004; Tusting & Maybin, 2007). In a sense, this synthesis constitutes a move to tie down ethnography (and open up linguistics), “pushing ethnography towards the analysis of clearly delimitable processes, increasing the amount of reported data that is open to falsification, looking to impregnate local description with analytical frameworks drawn from outside” (Rampton et al., 2004, p. 4). Linguistic ethnographers draw upon and combine analytic techniques from a variety of approaches to the study of language, communication, and society, including the ethnography of communication, interactional sociolinguistics, linguistic anthropology, conversation analysis, critical discourse analysis, and multimodality.

Specifically, with regard to the focal episode examined in this article, we engaged in an iterative process that involved the following analytic activities:

- A detailed transcription of spoken discourse and nonverbal communicative activities
- Segmentation into bounded units (Gumperz, 1999) according to transitions between activity structures or topics and also by means of boundary marking cues (Bloome, Carter, Christian, Otto, & Shuart-Faris, 2005)
- Microanalysis—by moving slowly through the transcript and tape, asking at each line, for instance, “What is the speaker doing?” “Why that, now?” “What else might have been done here but wasn’t?” (Rampton, 2006)
- Multimodal analysis—by replaying and reanalyzing the videotaping without audio, to focus on nonverbal communicative resources such as seating arrangements, body postures, dress, gesture, gaze, and writing, and in such a way as to bring into view those students whose participation in the lesson was less vocal (and were thus relatively absent from the transcript)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Discourse move</th>
<th>X Factor episode</th>
<th>Average in Ms. Leigh’s lessons</th>
<th>School corpus average</th>
<th>National averageb</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Open questions</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Closed questions</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Probe questions</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uptake questions</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elaborated feedback</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>13</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nonelaborated feedback</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>83</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student response to student</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student questions</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student participation (duration)</td>
<td>42.2%</td>
<td>30.2%</td>
<td>30.1%</td>
<td>25.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average length of student move (in seconds)</td>
<td>5.8</td>
<td>5.8</td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>5.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

• Transcontextual analysis—an examination of textual trajectories into and out of the event, attending, for example, to how various discourse genres were evoked, to texts recruited by participants (e.g., the stories, preceding lessons, curricular frames), and to the entextualization of the interaction in this episode as it is distilled into teacher reports, our transcripts, and so forth.

Finally, as noted earlier, we discussed this episode with Ms. Leigh and the other teachers, and their responses and interpretations have fed back into our analysis, providing leads which we have followed in additional iterations of micromodal, multimodal, and transcontextual analyses.

Overview of the Literacy Lesson

We now return to the Year 5 literacy lesson with which we opened this article. In discussing this lesson with us and the other teachers, Ms. Leigh mentioned multiple goals: to develop student understanding of what makes a good story (and thus how Harry and other students might further improve their writing), to encourage students to consider their audience (i.e., the effect their writing might have on the reader), to encourage students to engage in a process of continuous editing and redrafting to improve their work, to develop students’ analytic skills and ability to talk about texts, and to build enthusiasm for story writing and encourage whole-class participation. Specifically, Harry’s stories—the texts discussed in the focal episode—raised interesting issues about character description (e.g., how to introduce characters without slowing down the action), which Ms. Leigh hoped to explore with the class, and which we discuss in what follows.

The lesson as a whole included the following four sections:

1. Review of previous work and student targets (8 minutes). Ms. Leigh recaps the previous lesson and asks for a show of hands about which kinds of targets students have been assigned: V targets for vocabulary issues, C targets dealing with connectives, O targets for sentence openers, and P targets for punctuation. She then calls on individual students to read out their targets and answers questions about targets that do not fit neatly into the VCOP scheme (we discuss this scheme in greater detail in a later section).

2. Feedback on one student’s story (18 minutes, 45 seconds). This is the X Factor episode introduced already (and which we will examine in detail): Harry shares his stories and targets, and the rest of the students assess and discuss his improved version.

3. Group work (20 minutes). Students review their stories with a partner, discussing how they responded to their targets and other ways of further improving their stories.

4. Plenary conclusion (6 minutes, 30 seconds). Ms. Leigh calls upon one pair to share their work, and this leads into a discussion of how to build tension and engage the reader. Ms. Leigh congratulates the pair and the rest of the class on their progress.

In this article we examine the second episode, in which the students use X Factor as a way of assessing and discussing Harry’s stories. Before exploring this episode in detail, we summarize it briefly (see Table 2 for an overview of this episode, the online video recording at dx.doi.org/10.1598/RRQ.46.1.3, and the Appendix for a transcript of key phases). The episode can be roughly broken up into three main stages, which we have further subdivided into 13 phases: (1) presentation of stories and introduction of X Factor (phases 1–5), (2) student assessments, explanations, and related discussion (phases 6–12), and (3) conclusion (phase 13).

Stage 1: Presentation of Stories and Introduction of X Factor

The episode begins with Ms. Leigh calling on Harry to tell the class why he is keen to share his story. Harry says it’s because he knows he can make it much better, probably improving to a 4b or 4a (in national assessment levels; cf. QCA, 1999). Ms. Leigh replies, “Let us be the judge of that,” and asks the rest of the class to face Harry and “give him a stare.” She asks him to first read out the targets she had set for him on the basis of the first draft of his story, which were as follows:

- To be a Level 4b you need to
  - Read back over what you’ve written at the end of a paragraph to add in the words that are missing and affect the meaning of the plot
  - Keep working on using details and action but aiming to reach the ending of the plot so that all issues are resolved (even if this means changing your mind to shorten the second bit of action you want to use)

Following a brief discussion of these targets and how Harry might be able to overcome the problem of how to finish his stories in the allotted time, he reads out the first version of his story, which were as follows:

To be a Level 4b you need to
Table 2. Overview of Episode

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Phase</th>
<th>Main event</th>
<th>Duration (seconds)</th>
<th>Lines</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Presentation and scoring of stories</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Harry reads aloud his targets (prompting some whole-class discussion) and the first draft of his story</td>
<td>440</td>
<td>not provided</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Ms. Leigh introduces X Factor activity</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>1–22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Harry reads aloud the second draft of his story</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>not provided</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>In pairs, students discuss marks for Harry’s stories</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>not provided</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Presentation of scores for Harry’s story</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>101–130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student assessments, explanations,</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>William’s assessment: “In the first story you had more descriptive words.”</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>131–150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and related discussion</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Julie’s assessment: “The first one was better because he had like more descriptive words.”</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>151–162</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Tamara’s assessment: “He could’ve used like more descriptive words.”</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>163–238</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Gina’s assessment: “It was like level 4 or 5 in vocabulary, because it was really, really good.”</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>239–282</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Callum’s critique: “You never really explained as much as like the first one.”</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>283–325</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Ms. Leigh’s counterassessment: “So a simple phrase like that actually helps to give you lots of character details.”</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>326–362</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Karen’s analysis: “Well, I like the speech tags; I like the adverbs.”</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>363–397</td>
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<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>Closing: Harry: “Should I bow?”</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>398–416</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Were They Talking About? The Development of Ideas in the Episode” section later in this article.)

Ms. Leigh says to Harry, “OK, so we’re going to be your judges now,” and tells the class that they’re going to have X Factor (the scene recounted at the beginning of this paper). Harry then reads his second story out loud. Ms. Leigh projects this text on the whiteboard and instructs the students to discuss in pairs what they thought of the second story and the extent to which it had improved. These consultations last about 30 seconds, after which the students all turn to face Harry and raise their hands to display their scores (see Figure 2). At this point, almost all eyes are on Harry, and more than half the class have their backs to Ms. Leigh who is located at the front of the room (beyond the right edge of Figure 2). Harry (circled in Figure 2) rises out of his chair and surveys his scores, commenting enthusiastically about the 9s and 10s. Note that the classroom is now transformed into a polycentric space; throughout the episode, focus shifts between the two poles of Harry and Ms. Leigh.

Stage 2: Student Assessments, Explanations, and Related Discussion

In the next segment Harry receives feedback on his second story from six students—three of whom are nominated by Harry and the others of whom are nominated by Ms. Leigh, who also voices her own assessment. Most of this discussion revolves around the question of whether the description, and in particular the quantity of descriptive words, in the first story was better than that of the second—allegedly improved—story. Ms. Leigh challenges this line of criticism, first by calling on Tamara to comment on the quality of the words chosen, then by highlighting some words that she felt were particularly advanced, and finally by demonstrating how minimal descriptive details can provide excellent characterization without slowing down plot development.

Stage 3: Conclusion

Ms. Leigh summarizes the discussion by asking, “Do we all generally agree [Harry’s] story improved from yesterday?” (lines 404–405). The students assent, and William initiates a round of applause for Harry, who asks, “Should I bow?” (line 411).

Analysis

In the following discussion we examine the ways in which students and teacher draw upon and manage
A. First Version

Thursday 8th January

The storm

Prelude: The day was young and so were the children as they listened to their teacher talk on cloud ejection, not even of a strange occurrence that was about to take place.

Chapter 1: Today was like any other. Lewis’s hair was gelly up, the side blue eyes gleaming and not paying attention. Sam, for Scarlet’s really, except her blond hair was done, and she was actually paying attention. “Right, does every...? huh,” he almost asked. Then it all happened so quickly: the sky started to turn gray. A massive thunder started to roar. The sky started to turn gray. People rushed out to see what was going on. It was gala for the snake which can use dark magic, was standing on the edge of town, pulling dark magic into weather machine and making the weather bad. “I’m incompetent, brah, he’s. Someone will stop me knowing the weather is in my control.” He laughed, he disappeared.

B. Second Version

Thursday 15th January

The storm

Read back over what you’ve written at the end of a paragraph to add in the words that are missing and affect the meaning of the plot.

The A scorching heat blazed over the village, petalburg, sending rays of sunshine through the village school’s windows. It was a peaceful day, soundless except for the teachers’ formal voice. “Right, math anybody, know where Russia is?” The man asked gently. Straight after that moment, five clouds, darker than the deep depths of space, was obscuring the light of day. “Child, stay in your seats whilst,” he smiled as he noticed that all the children had gone out to see the unhappy darkness of the day. “No,” a bellout Leos had his the radiance glow of his eyes was set on a snake. (His shade’s was called ninja.) “What are you and what are you doing to the weather?” Beloved, Scarlet, her simply put up hair brushing to the side because of the cold breeze.

Note. Images show only the sections read aloud in class.
**Contrasting Discourse Genres: Whole-Class Feedback and X Factor**

Class feedback on an individual student’s written work is a relatively common activity at Abbeyford Primary School, part of the routine lesson sequence used to develop students’ writing skills. In Ms. Leigh’s literacy classes, feedback was usually given in the final few minutes of the lesson, in which several students read out their written work and receive comments.

Ms. Leigh always provided detailed individual feedback, but she also gave other students the opportunity to evaluate the work of their peers. In most cases, this peer feedback was directed by Ms. Leigh: “Spot the interesting technique that Carl has used”; “Is there anything in the story that makes you think, ‘Wow, what’s going to happen next?’”; “Think about powerful verbs, interesting adjectives, and time order—this will tell us if the report is good enough”; “Is there anything you would change about Rachel’s word choices or the style she’s writing in?” Students were keen to provide feedback in these situations and often offered additional advice to the student writer (e.g., “Can I make a suggestion for William? Because I know in his story he goes back in time, so maybe, erm, once he’s done the first bit—when he goes back in time he can do that little star thing [asterisk],” March 31, 2009).

*X Factor* is a highly popular British television music talent show in which would-be pop stars audition in front of a panel of celebrity judges to demonstrate that they have what it takes to be a successful recording artist (i.e., the elusive “X Factor”). The show was originally aired in 2004 (though its predecessor, *Pop Idol*, debuted in 2001) and has been exported throughout the world, including to the United States (*American Idol*), Canada (*Canadian Idol*), France (*Nouvelle Star*), Brazil (*Idolos*), and the Middle East (*Super Star*). *X Factor*’s creator, Simon Cowell, is also a judge on the panel, and his trademark harsh (but allegedly honest) comments have become a defining characteristic of the show. Cowell’s notoriety has elevated his career, and at the time of this writing, he is an influential international star and a central figure in *American Idol* as well as *X Factor*.

These shows share a common format: Thousands of aspiring pop artists take part in auditions held across the country during which the judges select the most talented to compete in a series of weekly live television shows. Each week individuals perform for the studio

**Figure 2. Harry Surveys His Marks**
and television audiences, and their singing abilities, performance techniques, appearance, star quality, and so-called likeability are critiqued by Cowell and his fellow judges (all experts in music and performing arts). After each show, a telephone vote from the audience at home decides the fate of the performers—the contestant with the fewest votes is eliminated from the competition.

In addition to their roles as arbiters of talent, the celebrity judges also act as mentors, each responsible for a group of contestants for whom they offer advice on song choice, performance, styling, and so on. Ultimately there is only one prize—a million-pound recording contract—and the fierce competition between the finalists is encouraged by the judges, who often draw explicit comparisons between performances/performers and strive to defend and elevate their own charges.

Teachers and students at Abbeyford Primary were familiar with X Factor; indeed, the school hosted its own X Factor talent show in July 2009, in which each Year group performed a song and was judged by a panel of staff, who did their best to impersonate Simon Cowell. X Factor and related shows were also a regular topic of conversation at the school, and for many, Cowell’s critiques were perceived as positive, a necessary evil that ultimately helps contestants to improve. Consider the following comment from one of the teachers with whom we discussed the focal episode; for the children in her class, Simon Cowell is a role model:

I was talking about Britain’s Got Talent in my class today, and they all could tell you that, well, Amanda’s not very good, because she just says they’re all quite good, and Piers is, sort of, like, in-between, but Simon really tells the truth, he’s really mean to them. But they like Simon because he is mean and he helps them get better. So, as well, they know, sort of, the different ways of giving feedback, as well. They all want to be a Simon Cowell, because he actually does tell the truth. (Comment in workshop, June 1, 2009)

Table 3 contrasts the discourse genre of conventional classroom feedback with X Factor in relation to a range of social, interactional, and discursive dimensions. At the level of central task there is a good deal of overlap between the two discourse genres: to assess and improve a performance of some kind by means of constructive criticism (written work in the case of class feedback and a singing performance in the case of X Factor). Both genres also embody the assumption that everyone cannot be equally excellent—some performances will be better than others, and assessments and rewards will be meted out accordingly. Only one of the X Factor contestants will win, and only an additional few will make an impact in the world of musical performance. Similarly, primary school students understand that assessments of their work (whether recorded privately by the teacher or publicly as part of whole-class feedback) are used to rank them relative to their peers. Most are aware of the class hierarchy and their place in it, and thus being asked to read out a piece of work poses both the opportunity to show off and the threat of humiliation.

There are differences, however, in many of the other areas, including, significantly, the bases for and object(s) of evaluation. Within X Factor, contestants are judged on the basis of their personality and moral character in addition to (and sometimes at the expense of) consideration of their actual performances. At the time of writing, for example, X Factor contestant Danyl Johnson, who was the favorite to win the show after his first audition, is suffering public backlash after judges accused him of being “cocky,” “overconfident,” “smug,” and “arrogant.” The media coverage Danyl has since received has been overwhelmingly negative, despite his strong vocal performances.

Within schools, in contrast, teachers are instructed to focus feedback on the student’s performance rather than on who they are, because overly personal feedback, oriented to the student’s self, can distract from the substantive issues (Hattie & Timperley, 2007). Further, although X Factor judgments focus almost exclusively on the immediacy of the performance, classroom evaluation is part of a process of continuous assessment, which takes account of an individual’s previous performances and level of ability, and the expectation is that students will improve week on week.

The genre of reality TV talent show, to which X Factor belongs, is often criticized in the media and educational forums for negatively influencing young people’s attitudes toward success—encouraging them to evaluate success in terms of performance and appearance rather than level of effort or academic achievement—and for the brutality of judges’ comments, which often become personal. Thus, the X Factor genre is reflective of a broader cultural ideology that establishes “standards of success as well as laying out a roadmap that defines how to get there” (Silverblatt, 2007, p. 136). We were therefore particularly interested in how X Factor might interact with more traditional genres of classroom evaluation.

How Did Participants Draw Upon and Manage the Two Discourse Genres?

Putting on a Show

William and Harry were the students most obviously attuned to the X Factor genre. At the first mention of X Factor, William hums the theme and raises his arms above his head in the trademark “X” sign. Later, when Ms. Leigh asks students to decide “How many marks out of 10 do you think we should give Harry for the improvement to his story?” (phase 4), Harry holds up
both hands and projects a perfect score of 10 around the room in the manner of an *X Factor* contestant pleading with the audience for telephone votes; William responds by showing Harry a nil sign.

William and Harry were friends, but as William’s nil sign indicates, they were also keen competitors in classroom tasks, and because they were confident, outgoing students, they were at the center of most of the classroom discussions we observed (these two boys are mentioned by name in field notes for 12 of the 13 lessons we observed in Ms. Leigh’s classroom). The two boys were often given special status in classroom activities (e.g., acting as team captains), and they were always among the first to volunteer for role-play and other kinds of classroom performances. They were also popular with their peers—notice one student’s use of the term *dude* to address Harry (line 125), a term used mainly to indicate a stance of solidarity or camaraderie (Kiesling, 2004).

Given their initial exuberance, the relationship these two boys share, and their academic and social standing in the classroom, it is perhaps unsurprising that Harry selects William as his first judge (lines 132–133) despite the fact that William’s score of 5 is much lower than that given by most of the other students. Harry asks, with mock indignation, “Excuse me, explain why you’ve only give me a 5” (line 133). That Harry is play-acting here is evident in his use of the overly formal and unnecessary—Harry already has William’s attention—preopener “excuse me” (line 132), the fact that he stands up to address William (who is sitting directly in front of him), and his use of an imperative

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Discourse genre</th>
<th>Feedback in a literacy lesson</th>
<th>X Factor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Social field</td>
<td>Education/schooling</td>
<td>Entertainment/television/music</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central task</td>
<td>To evaluate and improve a student’s written work</td>
<td>To evaluate and improve a contestant’s stage performance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participants and roles</td>
<td>Teacher and students</td>
<td>Celebrity judges/mentors, contestants, coaches, and audience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purposes</td>
<td>• Teacher: To improve an individual piece of student writing; to teach the rest of the class about qualities of good writing; to produce an institutionally adequate lesson; categorize students according to national standards of achievement • Students: To perform well, be accepted by peers, get through the lesson</td>
<td>• Producers/judges: To produce an entertaining show (as indicated in viewer ratings, which lead to advertising revenue); to organize contestants according to their relative talent; and to promote the best performers to the next level • Contestants: To win the show and/or launch a career in the entertainment industry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sequential structure/stages</td>
<td>Will typically include the following (though not necessarily in this order): • Discussion of targets/criteria • Sharing of student work • Judgment and/or interpretation of the work • Suggestions for improvement • Conclusion</td>
<td>Will typically include the following (usually in this order): • Review of contestant’s participation in competition so far (through edited clips) • Contestant’s stage performance • Critique of performance by judges (with some suggestions for improvement) • Interview with contestant (who then has the “right-to-reply” to the judges’ comments)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Topics/themes</td>
<td>Issues arising from student written work that are salient to the official curriculum</td>
<td>Contestant’s performance (but this focal point often overridden by discussion of judges’ own careers, arguments between judges, etc.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interactional norms</td>
<td>Speaking dominated by the teacher, who also allocates the floor; primarily in the form of initiation-response-evaluation/feedback</td>
<td>Speaking dominated by judges; host allocates the floor to individual judges, but judges also assume the power to self-select; lots of interruptions and overlap</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social relationships</td>
<td>Emotionally flat*; students are emotionally invested in peer relations, but these are downplayed in the public spaces of lessons</td>
<td>Emotionally charged; there is a competitive relationship between judges, but to their own acts, judges provide support and guidance in their role as “mentor”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language use</td>
<td>Polite or at least disciplined; use of standard grammatical forms</td>
<td>“Brutally honest” assessments of a contestant’s potential; highly emotive responses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluative criteria</td>
<td>National curriculum attainment levels and related learning objectives, divided into word, sentence, and text levels</td>
<td>Does the contestant have the “X Factor”? This encompasses musical talent, personality (e.g., genuineness, likeability), and moral character (e.g., humility, kindness)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

form usually reserved for teachers (“explain why”). Note also the classroom audience's appreciative laughter on line 135.

Excerpt 1

11 Ms. Leigh: OK Harry
12 I want you to pick three separate numbers
13 and ask them to explain why
14 ((Harry stands up out of his seat))
15 Harry: excuse me
16 explain why you've only give me a 5
17 Students: ((laughter))
18 ((most students put down their hands))
19 William: because
20 in the second story you didn’t
21 explain the:
22 Julie: ((to neighbouring student)) ((xxxxxxxxxxxxx))
23 William: man who was changing the weather
24 and
25 the characters (.)
26 and
27 in the other one-
28 because in the first one you had (.)
29 better descriptive words
30 in that one you had more
31 Harry: ((leaning forward))
32 Ms. Leigh: Julie what were you going to say because
33 you-
34 I could see you ((makes whispering noise))
35 on the back there
36 Julie: yeah like because h- the better-
37 the first one was better because he had
38 more descriptive words
39 but in that one he didn't like
40 describe the:
41 person who was changing the weather much
42 Harry: because I didn't get that far though
43 I didn't get that far
44 (so it's like-)

William evaluates Harry's first story as being better than the second because he claims it had “more descriptive words” (line 138), “better descriptive words” (line 148), and overall he felt that it gave greater explanation of character (lines 140–144). This assessment draws upon the resources of the school feedback genre: William's comments refer to specific elements of Harry's stories (e.g., line 142) and tap into shared frameworks for assessment (which highlight the importance of descriptive vocabulary). William's rather critical assessment of Harry's second story may also draw upon his experience of X Factor. As already noted, X Factor contestants who appear overly confident or arrogant are usually “put back in their place” by the judges' sobering comments.

By adopting the critical stance of an X Factor judge, while also drawing upon his knowledge of the school-based genre, William is able to orient both to the classroom task of peer assessment, and to his social relationship with Harry. Note also that rather than grading Harry on the improvement he made to his story through the redrafting process (as Ms. Leigh had requested), William is actually evaluating which version of the story is better. This focus on categorical judgment rather than on the process of improvement is more in keeping with X Factor evaluative criteria than school assessments, and it sets the tone for the following discussion. Note that this shift in focus threatens to undermine the school ideology of continuous improvement, according to which feedback and editing necessarily lead to better writing (and better writers).

Throwing a Spotlight on the Audience

Harry begins what appears to be a defense of his second story (line 150) but is interrupted by Ms. Leigh, who calls on Julie to give her assessment.

Excerpt 2

151 Ms. Leigh: Julie what were you going to say because
152 you-
153 I could see you ((makes whispering noise))
154 on the back there
155 Julie: yeah like because h- the better-
156 the first one was better because he had
157 more descriptive words
158 but in that one he didn't like
159 describe the:
160 Harry: because I didn't get that far though
161 I didn't get that far
162 (so it's like-)

Ms. Leigh had noticed Julie's off-stage whispering (on line 141) and appears to be indirectly reprimanding her (on lines 151–153). Julie quotes William (almost) directly: "yeah like because h- the better- the first one was better because he had like more descriptive words but in that one he didn’t like describe the person who was changing the weather much" (compare with lines 137–138 and 140–142). This repetition is not immediately apparent. Julie does not cast her comment as building upon or agreeing with William; in fact, her relative lack of fluency, the hesitation, and use of “like” gives the impression of real-time processing of thought. But this repetition is significant because, as we shall see, the majority of the student contributions in this segment can be traced back to William’s initial utterance. Harry begins to respond to Julie’s criticism (lines 160–162), but is again interrupted by Ms. Leigh, who calls on Tamara.

From Quantity to Quality of Descriptive Words

Ms. Leigh attempts to move the discussion on by asking Tamara, “What did you think about the quality of the words that he used?” (lines 164–165).

Excerpt 3

163 Ms. Leigh: Tamara
164 what did you think about
165 the quality of the words that he used
166 Tamara: they were quite good
167 but (2)
168 he could’ve used like more descriptive 
169 words
170 Ms. Leigh: give me an example
171 Tamara: li::ke (2)
172 (some xxxxxx)
173 Ms. Leigh: (come on) William you’ve spoken now 
174 so for example
175 my personal choice
176 I really liked er
177 scalding ((pointing out words on the 
178 whiteboard))
179 er blazed
180 peaceful
181 and there’s another one
182 Student: [what does placid mean
183 Ms. Leigh: calm 
184 radiance 
185 I thought actually the word choices were 
186 very advanced 
187 what would you have preferred to have seen
188 Tamara: erm more like ( )
189 I don’t know really 
190 it’s just hard to explain
191 Ms. Leigh: OK
192 Harry: you can say it’s rubbish 
193 I don’t mind
194 Ms. Leigh: would you say that
195 Tamara: no
196 Ms. Leigh: why not

Rather than responding to Ms. Leigh’s focus on quality, Tamara continues the theme of quantity of descriptive words introduced by William, saying that the second version would have benefited from “like more descriptive words” (line 168). Ms. Leigh challenges this assessment, asking her to provide examples to back up this assertion (line 169). When Tamara is unable to do this, Ms. Leigh refers to the whiteboard to highlight the word choices in the second version of the story which she personally liked—scalding, blazed, placid, and so on—asking what Tamara would have preferred to have seen (lines 176–186). In this sequence, Tamara and Ms. Leigh take on conventional classroom roles. This is evident in the extended interrogation that Ms. Leigh conducts, her use of the whiteboard on lines 175–181 (which focuses attention on her and on the front of the classroom, rather than on the student-contestant Harry), and the various strategies that Tamara employs to evade her teacher’s questions, including the use of pauses, hesitation, fillers such as “like” (lines 170–171, 188, 202–203), and stock excuses (“I don’t know really, it’s just hard to explain,” lines 189–190).

By line 191, Tamara’s strategies appear to have worked and Ms. Leigh moves to end the exchange with “OK.” Harry prevents closure of the topic, however, when he interjects with, “You can say it’s rubbish. I don’t mind” (lines 192–193). Harry’s interjection reframes Tamara’s hesitation from insufficiently elaborated student response to overly sensitive (and hence not appropriate for X Factor) judge response. It can also be seen as an attempt to refocus attention on the X Factor game and on him as contestant. Harry self-selects, in keeping with the interactional privileges awarded to him by the X Factor game, and uses a term (rubbish) that is more fitting in X Factor–style judgments than in traditional classroom feedback. Ms. Leigh co-opts Harry’s comment but moves back into the frame of conventional teacher–student talk. She asks Tamara, “Would you say that?” and “Why not?” (lines 194 and 196). Tamara is unsure of how to respond, perhaps in part because of genre ambiguity.

It is worth emphasizing that in the discussions of both Julie’s and Tamara’s evaluations (excerpts 2 and 3) the class has returned to more conventional interactional patterns. Ms. Leigh directs the conversation, nominates respondents (lines 151 and 163) and disciplines students who are not paying attention (line 172), and the students address their comments to her, speaking of Harry in the third person (e.g., lines 157, 168) and orienting their posture and gaze toward Ms. Leigh.

A Favorable Judgment
Ms. Leigh next selects Callum to explain his score, but she checks herself midway through, and instead hands authority back to Harry, in accordance with the rules of the game that she introduced at the start of the lesson, that is, that Harry chooses his own three judges (lines 240–243). Note that granting the contestants authority to choose their own judges is not a rule of the X Factor show, but it is also not a feature of the feedback genre typical in Ms. Leigh’s lessons.

Excerpt 4
239 Ms. Leigh: OK Callum what did you give- 
240 oh sorry
241 I shouldn’t do that should I 
242 Harry 
243 you had two more choices for people who 
244 gave you marks 
245 Gina: why did you give me a 10 out of 10 Gina 
246 and ( ) erm 
247 instead of using like just 
248 hot and sunny 
249 you actually use- used like
250 scalding heat blazed and
251 it was really good description
252 and it was very very like
253 like it was like level 4 or 5 in vocabulary
254 because it was really really good
255 and erm
256 the way you described Scarlett was really really good

Ms. Leigh’s reformulation (lines 240–243) may indicate her sensitivity to the change in classroom dynamics brought about by her extended (over 2 minutes, from lines 163 to 238) interaction with Tamara. When we focused our attention on members of the audience (rather than on the speakers), and on multimodal communication, we observed a slide in the students’ attention during this period of traditional teacher–student recitation. By line 188, very few students are orienting their gaze and posture toward the speakers; a number of them yawn, look down at their desks, or hold their heads in their hands. When Ms. Leigh reactivates X Factor (line 243) and allows Harry to select his next judge, however, the children reengage with the lesson, craning their heads and shifting position to see the speaker.

Harry selects Gina, who had given him 10 out of 10. Gina builds on Ms. Leigh’s positive assessment of Harry’s word choices: “Instead of using like just hot and sunny, you actually use—used like ‘scalding heat blazed’ and it was really good description” (lines 247–251). The description was so good, Gina suggests, it would probably be “level 4 or 5 in vocabulary” (referring to national assessment levels) (line 253). Ms. Leigh probes this response, asking, “what did it do for you as a reader?” (line 258; this segment is analyzed in greater depth in a later section).

Some “Honest” Feedback

Before Harry selects his third judge, Ms. Leigh primes the class, goading, “Come on, who’s going to give Harry some honest feedback” (line 288).

Excerpt 5

283 Ms. Leigh: right Harry we’ve had
284 a girl and a boy
285 so now somebody else who’s given you
286 not a 10 out of 10
287 not a 5 out of 10
288 [come on, who’s going to give Harry some honest feedback]
289 [((Callum changes from 6 fingers to 4))]
290 Callum: me ((moves hand in Harry’s direction))
291 Harry: er ((looks around the room))
292 William: 4 ((points to Callum’s hand))
293 (2)
294 Harry: Callum go on then
295 why did you give me a 4
296 Callum: er well like
297 you never really explained as much
298 [as like the first one
299 [((Rachel and William raise their hands))]
300 Harry: I didn’t get up to there [people
301 Callum: [yeah but you c-
302 (2)
303 OK
304 you could have like done the characters
305 like you and the teacher or whatever you were
306 [or was you even in it
307 Harry: [((looks back at first version of story on his desk))
308 oh you mean describe the teacher
309 Callum: [yeah
310 Harry: aw right yeah
311 William: [((changes from one raised hand to another))]
312 [((to Ms. Leigh)) I’ve just got a comment
313 Ms. Leigh: [((to William)) hold on one second
314 [((to Harry)) do you agree
315 Harry: yeah I-
316 yeah I- I guess so
317 I missed out-
318 all I said is he had a quiet voice and that’s all so
319 I suppose I could have described him a bit better
320 like that he had a like
321 that he had erm () thick glasses
322 erm neatly- neatly thingy
323 side-partin martin
324 and stuff
325 Students: [((Laughter))
326 Ms. Leigh: OK

Within X Factor, “honest” often means Simon Cowell–like harsh criticism. Callum (who sits directly opposite Harry) reduces his score from 6 to 4 (a change highlighted by his neighbor William, on line 292) and appears eager to speak—his right hand, which displays the score, is outstretched toward Harry, and he pleads, “me” (line 290). Harry surveys the room for around 5 seconds (lines 291–294), but no other students bid for a turn; he thus reluctantly selects Callum as the next judge. The resignation audible in the statement, “Callum go on then” (line 294), is in marked contrast with the playfulness of his earlier comment, “Excuse me, explain why you only give me a 5” (lines 132–133). Callum brings the discussion back to the issue of character description, again echoing the idea originally expounded by William that more is better (lines 297–298). Harry responds defensively and with more than a hint of exasperation, appealing not just to Callum but to the whole class to cut him some slack: “I didn’t get up to there, people” (line 300). As he speaks, Harry’s body tenses and he holds out his hands, palms up, in a beseeching gesture. The utterance is also marked by a
stylized local accent (e.g., l-vocalization in “people,” a recognizable feature of London speech in which the l at the end of a syllable is pronounced using a sound closer to a vowel), perhaps as a way of promoting a sense of camaraderie with his peers (i.e., his X Factor audience; Snell, in press).

Callum begins to argue with Harry, interrupting his defense with “yeah but”—but then checks himself and pauses for a couple of seconds before explaining his intent in a calm, almost didactic tone (lines 301–306). Harry accepts Callum’s suggestion and performs for the rest of the class an entertaining account of how he could have described the characters (lines 319–324). Harry’s response to Callum could also be termed a performance in another sense. X Factor contestants are judged not only on the basis of their singing performance but also on how openly and graciously they accept (or at least appear to accept) criticism. In this situation, it is possible that Harry does not actually agree with Callum’s critique, but feigns agreement so as to appear humble and thus more likeable.

Concluding the Episode

Toward the end of the episode, Ms. Leigh signals that she is ready to move on from X Factor: Her “OK” (line 398) marks a transition to another part of the lesson, and she tells the students to put their “hands down” (line 400) (a few of the students had persisted with their raised X Factor scores throughout the interaction).

Excerpt 6

398  Ms. Leigh: OK
399  I’ll come to you in a second
400  hands down
401  because we’re going to run out of time in a moment
402  we’re thinking about our stories today then
403  Harry we could’ve-
404  do we all generally agree
405  his story improved from yesterday
406  Students: yeah
407  William: ((Clapping))
408  Ms. Leigh: oh that’s nice
409  a big round of applause for Harry
410  Students: ((Clapping))
411  Harry: should I bow
412  Ms. Leigh: pardon
413  Harry: should I bow
414  Ms. Leigh: No
415  Students: ((Laughter))
416  Ms. Leigh: that’s taking it too far
417  right
418  so what you’re going to do with your partner is

Ms. Leigh summarizes the discussion by asking, “Do we all generally agree [Harry’s] story improved from yesterday?” (lines 404–405). This is a curious account of the discussion, because actually the question of which story was better has been contested throughout. However, this summary does make sense in the context of the ideology embedded within the classroom feedback genre: Students should be rewarded with praise for presenting their work, and feedback-and-redrafting necessarily leads to improvement. The students assent, and William initiates a round of applause for Harry, reintroducing X Factor as a salient frame. Harry is keen to fulfill his part: “Should I bow?” he asks (lines 411, 413). But the teacher reasserts control: “No, that’s taking it too far” (lines 414–416).

Interim Summary

The introduction of X Factor led to an intensification of involvement of almost the entire class, especially in the beginning of the episode. Students were given the opportunity to inhabit different kinds of roles. Harry rose to the occasion, performing for the class and winning their appreciative laughter. His unconventional role as “X Factor contestant” granted him nonstudent interactional privileges (e.g., standing up, nominating students, interrupting). William also participated actively in this unconventional discourse genre—he spoke out of turn and was extremely active nonverbally. He was reprimanded once (line 172, at a point where Ms. Leigh had moved into traditional classroom recitation), but otherwise his exuberance was tacitly accepted by the teacher.

Not all of the students took part in this alternative interactional order, however. Although some students participated actively in the lesson—bidding enthusiastically for turns, self-selecting, gesturing, engaging other students in dialogue—others had to be drawn (sometimes reluctantly) into the discussion by the teacher. In this class, the more active students were generally male (though this was not the case in other classrooms observed during the study). In a feedback conversation based on this extract, Ms. Leigh commented, “There’s more or less a 50–50 split between girls and boys, so it’s not as though, physically, they should dominate the room more or, proportionately, they would have more opinions, but it does tend to be the boys who talk more about their writing than the girls.”

Based on our observations of other lessons in this classroom and on our conversations with Ms. Leigh, we know that Harry, William, and Callum, in particular, were very often the center of attention and the focus of classroom interaction. Because of their dominance, these boys were in a better position than the other students to exploit the opportunities presented by importing popular culture in this instance. X Factor needs
confident performers, and in this context, that role naturally fell upon Harry, William, and Callum. It was these boys who fully engaged with the X Factor genre and with the interactional privileges it afforded them.

Ms. Leigh moved in and out of X Factor according to competing pedagogical goals. In lines 239 to 241, the transition between school-based discourse genre and X Factor is made explicit. Ms. Leigh is about to select the next speaker (in accordance with traditional classroom discourse norms), but stops herself (“oh sorry, I shouldn’t do that should I”) and transfers authority to the student-contestant Harry, acknowledging that she does not have a role in X Factor (she is neither contestant nor judge). On other occasions, the move between genres is less direct, as when Ms. Leigh calls on Tamara to move the discussion in what she seems to hope would be a more productive direction (i.e., onto a discussion of what makes for effective character description; lines 164–165).

Ultimately, Ms. Leigh retains control of the discussion. She stops students from interrupting during her more didactic exchanges (e.g., line 172) and prevents the student-contestant Harry from having his “right-to-reply” (e.g., lines 150, 163), but accepts X Factor–style comments that contribute to her pedagogical aims (e.g., lines 192–194). She decides which genre conventions are and are not possible in this situation (e.g., lines 288 and 416, respectively), and makes it clear when she feels that it is time to move away from X Factor completely and on to the next classroom activity (lines 398–401). This decision to move on to the next activity—to attend to other lesson goals—is at least in part motivated by the sense that time was running out, a point which Ms. Leigh emphasized in discussing the episode with the other teachers.

**What Were They Talking About? 
The Development of Ideas in the Episode**

The central point of contention in the episode was which of the two story versions contained the better description. The dominant opinion, voiced by William, Julie, Tamara, and Callum, was that the second version was inferior to the first because it had fewer descriptive words, less advanced vocabulary, and inadequate character description. This criticism was disputed by Gina, who claimed that the second story contained “really good description...level 4 or 5 in vocabulary,” and by Ms. Leigh who cited some “very advanced” words and also challenged the view that more description is necessarily better. In this section we explore the conflicting evaluations, where they came from, and how they were developed in the episode.

The students’ evaluations—both negative and positive—appear to be based upon an implicit set of criteria for assessment of story value, including the following:

- **More character description = better story** (e.g., lines 140–144, 256, 304)
- **More descriptive words = better character description** (e.g., lines 155–159)
- **More advanced words = better description/better story** (e.g., lines 138, 148, 168, 245–254)

This way of thinking about writing quality appears to be widespread in primary schools in England and is inadvertently promoted, alongside competing approaches, in policy documents and supporting materials. Underlying this formula is an essentialist theory of word value, according to which value is “predetermined, a function of the word’s obscurity, specificity and/or length” (Lefstein, 2009, p. 390).

This essentialism is manifest in the VCOP (Vocabulary-Connectives-Openers-Punctuation) posters that decorate the walls of every classroom in the school, and that are frequently invoked in classroom discourse. At the heart of this scheme, as implemented in Abbeyford Primary at least, is a set of four pyramids that sort words and punctuation marks into levels. Different vocabulary words are arranged according to five levels, which mirror the five National Curriculum levels relevant to primary education. Students are encouraged to “select interesting words to improve the quality of their writing,” and teachers are promised that attention to advanced vocabulary, connectives, openers, and punctuation will raise their students’ test scores (see the testimonials and forum on the publisher’s website, www.andrelleducation.co.uk). VCOP pyramids are prominently posted in all classrooms in the school, and teachers frequently employ the scheme in setting targets and discussing student work. Indeed, Ms. Leigh oriented students to VCOP at the beginning of the lesson by asking them whether their improvement targets were V, C, O, or P targets. Likewise, in the episode, Gina invoked VCOP when she asserted that some of the words Harry used were “level 4 or 5 in vocabulary.”

To investigate which version of the story had more and “better” descriptive words, we analyzed the two story excerpts that were read out loud in class. We adopted the method of analysis implicit in the students’ judgments: We tabulated all the descriptive words used in the story and, upon the basis of this decontextualized list, contrasted their quantities and qualities (see Table 4). The first story has fewer adjectives but slightly more descriptive words altogether.12 None of the words appear on the VCOP poster, so we used calculations of word length and obscurity as proxies for essential word value. Differences in word length (measured in characters) are insignificant. Obscurity, measured as
the proportion of words with a frequency of fewer than 800 on the British National Corpus (BNC; marked with an asterisk in Table 4), appears significant, but it is the second story that contains more obscure (and therefore presumably more advanced) descriptive words. As an indication of the reliability of this method, consider the six words identified by Ms. Leigh as her personal favorites: four (scalding, blazed, placid, and radiance) meet the standard we set for relative obscurity, and although the other two (peaceful and obscuring) do not, they still receive relatively low frequency scores.

This contrast of the two stories raises questions about William’s, Julie’s, Tamara’s, and Callum’s comments: If their assessments were not based on the stories, what were they talking about? And why? One possibility is that they did not have sufficient access to the texts: The two stories were read out loud in the lesson only once, and just one of them (the second version)
was displayed on the whiteboard, which was only partially visible to most of the students. These conditions might explain why the few references they make to the stories are vague. With limited access to the texts, Callum, Julie, and Tamara appear to base their answers on William's initial evaluation. William, it would seem, drew from a number of resources on hand, fusing together the following:

- **Topic**—character description, which was highlighted by Ms. Leigh in her initial instructions to the student-judges, “[Harry] has to make sure he was adding enough detailed description to give us some ideas about what was going on”
- **Assessment criteria**—based upon VCOP, which is posted on the wall and was also flagged up by Ms. Leigh at the beginning of the lesson
- **A combative critical stance**—based upon the X Factor judges, especially Simon Cowell

Ms. Leigh challenged the students' evaluations in three ways. First, she gave counterexamples of “very advanced words” (lines 175–185) from the second draft, which she favored, and asked Tamara, “What would you have preferred to have seen?” (line 186). Note that this strategy questions the students' application of essentialist criteria to Harry's word choices but does not challenge the essentialist theory of word value itself. Next, she probes Gina's positive assessment of Harry's vocabulary choices, which are a revoicing of some of Ms. Leigh's own “personal favorite” words from a few moments earlier, asking what the description did for her as a reader. In such a way, she challenges Gina's appeal to an essentialist notion of high level vocabulary, adding a new criterion about rhetorical effects. Gina answers, “It makes you think that...she's really nice and pretty. You want to know more about her because...you've described her so well!” (lines 260–264). Gina's use of stock responses like “you want to know more about her” (line 263) does not give Ms. Leigh much to work with in pursuing this line of inquiry, though perhaps X Factor could have been a useful guide at this point. Consideration of the subjective gut reactions offered by X Factor judges might have provided a bridge between Gina's existing knowledge of evaluative frames and related vocabulary and the kind of readerly response that Ms. Leigh was trying to promote.

Finally, toward the end of the episode, after Harry has acquiesced to Callum's criticism, and demonstrated orally how he might have added more description of one of the characters, Ms. Leigh challenges the idea that more description is necessarily better:

**Excerpt 7**

314 Ms. Leigh: (to Harry) do you agree  
315 Harry: yeah I-

At the beginning of the excerpt (lines 319–324), Harry demonstrates how he might have described the teacher in his story, and his performance earns him appreciative laughter from some of his classmates. The problem with such description is that it does little to advance the plot. National Literacy Strategy guidance on characterization specifically discusses this problem, which is common in student writing:

Many young writers find it hard to build up characterisation. They muddle this with character description, which is dropped into the story in one chunk, e.g. “Tom came into the room. He was a tall boy with dark hair. He wore blue jeans and talked with a deep voice. He had trainers on....” The problem with too much description is that it can interfere with the narrative. (United Kingdom Department for Education and Skills [DfES], 2001, p. 2)

Ms. Leigh's discussion of how “a simple phrase...actually helps to give you lots of character details” echoes this advice. Moreover, in her comments, Ms. Leigh highlights an important difference between the two stories. Although in the first story character description
is direct (e.g., “Lewis’s hair was geled up, there to the side, blue eyes gleaming and not paying attention”), in his second attempt Harry developed character through action and dialogue (e.g., “Children stay in your seats while,” he finished as he noticed that all the children had gone out.”).

We cannot tell on the basis of one episode, what, if anything, the students learned from this explanation (or from the lesson overall). What we can note, however, is the way in which Ms. Leigh had to step out of the X Factor interactional frame to make this substantive point. One of the problems she experienced in the lesson was that, in the way she set up the activity, she had no legitimate role as an active participant in X Factor. Thus, every teacherly contribution to the discussion was at the same time a disruption of the alternative discourse genre she had introduced.

Discussion

In this article we have shown how Ms. Leigh and her students managed the introduction of aspects of a popular culture discourse genre into a literacy lesson. By slowing down our analysis, tuning in to the minute details and focusing on discourse genres as a unit of analysis, we have demonstrated the complexities of this event: how students and teacher moved in and out of discourse genres, struggled over the definition of the situation, and called upon multiple resources in pursuing multiple social and academic goals. In the following section we discuss the primary theoretical contributions of the analysis of this event.

Dynamics of Discourse Genre Mixing

Existing research has tended to cast the interaction of popular culture and classroom discourse genres in relatively stark terms: either complete separation (with some students orienting to popular culture while the teacher and other students are focused on the curriculum) or transformative third space integration. Although “weaving” does offer a more moderate metaphor, it is nevertheless too harmonious and teacher-centered to capture the messiness of the X Factor episode. In trying to make sense of this episode—and as key concepts for future study of discourse genres and their interaction in classrooms—the following phenomena seem to us particularly noteworthy.

Coconstruction

Ms. Leigh’s introduction of X Factor into the lesson was one of many spur-of-the-moment decisions that fill a day of teaching, not necessarily the product of careful planning or explicit instruction. As such, if the students had not responded to it so exuberantly, the “event” would likely never have occurred. The students played an active role in shaping the event, defining which aspects of X Factor were salient, sustaining it over time, and using it to pursue purposes that were probably not intended by their teacher. Classroom activity, like all social interaction, is co-constructed (Erickson, 2004); the introduction of X Factor opened up spaces and offered opportunities for greater student agency in this process.

Oscillation

Throughout the episode, the class shifted back and forth between X Factor–influenced performances and more traditional forms of classroom participation. Such oscillations were signaled through explicit teacher metapragmatic commentary (e.g., “Oh sorry, I shouldn’t do that should I?” on lines 240–241) and implicit teacher and student invocations of both X Factor and classroom feedback frames (e.g., Harry’s “Should I bow?” on line 411; Gina’s references to national curriculum assessment levels on line 253). These oscillations were evident in forms of participation, in discursive choices, and in the organization of classroom space (as the center of attention shifted between Harry and Ms. Leigh).

Contestation and Misalignment

Oscillation implies a large degree of orderliness, as if the entire class moved as one between discourse genres, with a shared understanding of which frame was salient at each moment. However, in actuality the situation was messier, with different actors appearing at times to be simultaneously participating in different generic events. For example, Harry’s attempts to respond to other students’ judgments, which make sense as part of the X Factor game, were either interrupted (lines 150 and 160–162) or hijacked (lines 192–193) by Ms. Leigh in a reassertion of conventional classroom turn-taking rules (though she does allow judge–contestant confrontation to unfold in the case of Callum’s critique in lines 300–310). The insight that different participants can inhabit different genres at the same time and in the same event has implications for how one theorizes the mixing of school-based and popular culture discourse genres. Neither complete separation (e.g., script and counter-script) nor integrative third space hybridity is an appropriate description for Ms. Leigh’s lesson, which seems rather to embody a contested hybridity. Further, different students took part in the X Factor game to varying degrees. Although Harry’s, William’s, and Callum’s participation suggests that they were well-attuned to X Factor performance possibilities, Julie’s, Tamara’s, and Gina’s participation was typical of conventional classroom genres. Rarely did these different genre frames interact with one another.
Regimentation
The students and Ms. Leigh drew upon and mixed various elements of both classroom feedback and X Factor discourse genres. However, we hypothesize that not all elements could be readily combined, and that choices in this regard are to an extent regimented by the school context. Most crucially, inasmuch as students recruited X Factor, it was to manage social relations, try out identities, and entertain the classroom audience; but the content of their evaluations of writing quality relied upon established assessment frameworks (more and better descriptive words, VCOP, and national curriculum assessment levels). X Factor afforded a degree of playfulness, but the game did not (and perhaps could not) impinge upon what really matters in the reigning ideology of primary schooling in the United Kingdom. Such regimentation is shaped by the institutions of accountability in education: the national tests, league tables, inspectorate, and performance management. Working in a school with falling test scores and an impending inspection, Ms. Leigh was not in a position to deviate significantly from curricular contents and assessment structures perceived to be crucial for success in the national tests. This context may help explain why X Factor only gained limited traction in the lesson, despite the students' enthusiasm.

Bringing Popular Culture Into the Classroom
In the beginning of this article we noted the near consensus among educational researchers in celebration of mixing popular culture and classroom discourse genres. Building on Marsh (2008), we outlined four arguments concerning why and how popular culture should be brought into classrooms. Although the X Factor episode does not neatly fit any of those models, it does bear upon many of the issues they highlight. From our conversations with her, and from her actions in the lessons, it appears that Ms. Leigh’s primary motivation in mentioning X Factor, and in sustaining it as a salient frame of reference, was instrumental: to attract students’ interest, especially through orchestration of dramatic confrontations of contestant and judges. This ploy was largely successful, as evidenced, for example, in students’ heightened engagement both when giving their scores at the beginning of the episode (lines 101–127) and then again before the appointment of the third judge (lines 283–294).

In keeping with the cultural capital and third space models, the introduction of the X Factor discourse genre led to fundamental shifts in interactional patterns and new student roles. Classroom space became polycentric: Attention periodically shifted from the traditional front-of-room teacher focus to student focus, with much of the action centered on Harry as contestant. Students responded to one another directly, without teacher mediation, and freely challenged one another and resisted their teacher’s ideas. However, on further investigation, these changes were not necessarily cause for celebration. First, although the introduction of X Factor created a space in which the teacher’s voice was less dominant, the students who filled that space (William, Harry, and Callum) were the very same boys who were normally most dominant in this classroom. On reflection, this dynamic is not surprising: Their central position in the classroom facilitated their exploitation of the opportunities afforded by the introduction of X Factor into the lesson; so although discourse genre mixing led to shifts in classroom power relations, these shifts did not involve empowerment of traditionally marginalized students in this case.

Second, these changes in interactional patterns and participation structures appear to have led to a narrowing rather than expansion of learning opportunities, with X Factor-ish critical stance and confrontations at times distracting the class from meaningful discussion of different approaches to characterization. To a certain extent, then, participants were engaged more in “procedural display” (Bloome, Puro, & Theodorou, 1989) than substantive academic learning. This characterization is especially apt in the case of the extended interaction between Ms. Leigh and Tamara, with its leading questions (lines 223–224), stock responses (line 168) and excuses (lines 189–190, 229–230). However, upon examination, the interactions around William’s and Callum’s critical comments, though exuberant and at times entertaining, are similarly problematic vis-à-vis engagement with the substantive issues. In a sense, Harry’s, William’s, and Callum’s displays of hyperengagement mask the superficial ways in which the class engages with the issue of characterization.

Third, Ms. Leigh possessed no clear role in the X Factor game as it played out in this lesson, and as such could not intervene to probe students’ ideas or offer her own interpretations without “stopping” the game. Throughout the episode, Ms. Leigh juggled the competing goals of engaging students, giving them voice, managing participation, advancing new perspectives on story quality, and getting through the lesson.

Although some of the problems Ms. Leigh encountered are likely specific to X Factor, we suggest that this challenge of managing multiple goals, and the ways in which popular cultural resources interact with these goals, is inherent to the practice of teaching more generally. Although teachers may be tempted to bring popular culture into their classrooms to draw students into the lesson and facilitate change in interactional norms, they thereby may also introduce less helpful discursive resources and frames of reference. Indeed, the same
discursive resources that make popular culture attractive as a means of motivating students to engage in classroom activity (i.e., their entertainment value) may, in many cases, also be counterproductive for meaningful and substantive academic learning. This is not an argument against the use of popular culture, but rather a recognition that any intervention on pedagogy as an inherently complex practice, which integrates multiple and often conflicting concerns, will involve trade-offs and the introduction of new dilemmas.

The episode analyzed here demonstrates, of course, that teachers are not able to dictate precisely which elements of a popular culture discourse genre will be exploited by students, and in what ways. Nevertheless, attention to the social and discursive associations that accompany discourse genres as they enter the classroom (e.g., the various dimensions outlined in Table 3) may help alert teachers to both potential problems and productive possibilities. For example, one aspect of X Factor, which was untapped in the lesson, was the similarity between X Factor judgments as intuitive, gut reactions, and the sort of unfettered reader responses Ms. Leigh tried to encourage at points in the lesson (e.g., line 258). Another useful resource might have been to draw upon the participant role of mentor rather than judge, and thus charge the students with giving Harry advice on how to improve his writing for the next round of assessment.

In concluding this article, we would like to summarize its primary contributions: problematizing the currently popular idea that teachers should incorporate more popular culture into the classroom—not necessarily arguing that this is a bad idea, rather that discourse genre mixing is more complicated than is often suggested; offering a conceptual framework for contrasting discourse genres and for examining the realization of these genres in classroom interaction; and pointing to pedagogical implications.

Notes
1 For helpful reviews see Bazerman (2003), Briggs and Bauman (1992), Devitt (2008), and Kamberelis (1995).
2 Our choice of the term discourse genre is influenced by Hanks’s (1987) integration of Bakhtin’s genre theory and Bourdieu’s practice theory (Bourdieu). Related terms include communicative genre (Luckmann, 2009), interactional genre (Sawyer, 2002), speech genre (Bakhtin, 1986), activity type (Levinson, 1979), or discourse event (Blum-Kulka, 2005).
3 We have taken some liberties with the labels and contents of Marsh’s categories, though we believe that our discussion is in keeping with their spirit.
4 Third space is used in very similar ways in cultural theory (e.g., Bhabha, 1994), though it is noteworthy that Gutierrez and colleagues’ work was initially developed independently of this scholarship (Gutierrez, 2008).
5 The borough is ranked 21 out of 354 authorities on the governmental “Index of Multiple Deprivation,” a measure that takes into account seven domains of deprivation (Income, Employment, Health Deprivation and Disability, Education Skills and Training, Barriers to Housing and Services, Crime, and the Living Environment).
6 About three quarters of the students identify as white, with the largest minority, 8.8%, identifying their backgrounds as Black African. According to 2001 census data for the wards from which the school draws its students (weighted by proportion of students in wards), 9.7% of adults in the area hold higher education degrees (compared to 19.2% nationally), and 13.6% of household heads work in higher managerial and professional occupations (compared with 20.1% nationally).
7 We distinguish between structural, epistemic, interpersonal, substantive, and political dimensions of dialogic pedagogy (Lefstein, 2010; Lefstein & Snell, in press). As we show, changes in interactional structures do not necessarily coincide with corresponding transformations in the treatment of content and participants.
8 The details of these analytic processes have been documented for training purposes in an unpublished document that is available from the authors.
9 These illustrative quotations are taken from a lesson on writing story openers (January 7, 2008) and a lesson in which students wrote sports reports for inclusion in the school newspaper (May 7, 2008).
10 Amanda Holden and Piers Morgan are judges on Simon Cowell’s television show Britain’s Got Talent.
11 Transcription notations are as follows:
- (text) Transcription uncertainty
- (xxxxxxx) Indistinguishable speech
- () Brief pause (under one second)
- (l) Longer pause (number indicates length to nearest whole second)
- // Description of prosody or nonverbal activity
- [ Overlapping talk or action
- [ Emphasized relative to surrounding talk (underlined words)
- text Stretched sounds
- sh- Word cut off
- >text< Speech delivered more rapidly than surrounding speech
- TEXT Shouting
- (hhh) Audible inhalation
12 Our inclusion of verbs in addition to adjectives and adverbs reflects the role assigned to “powerful verbs” as a means of describing characters in the National Literacy Strategy guidance; see especially United Kingdom Department for Education and Employment (DfEE, 2000) and Lefstein (2009) for a critique.
13 We speculate that there may be at least three reasons Ms. Leigh defended the second story: She preferred its advanced vocabulary and more sophisticated approach to characterization, she sought to promote the narrative of improvement through redrafting, and she sought to protect Harry from his peers’ criticism.
14 This view of teaching is elaborated in Lampert (2001) and—with special attention to dialogic pedagogy—Lefstein (2010) and Lefstein and Snell (in press).

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Appendix

Episode Transcript

1 Ms. Leigh: OK so (.)
2 we’re going to be your judges now
3 we’re going to have X Factor
4 Students: yeah
5 Ms. Leigh: we’re going to decide
6 William: ((shakes X Factor theme and gestures))
7 Ms. Leigh: (marks out of 10
8 for how much (.)
9 Harry has improved
10 in the second version of his story
11 Harry: ((begins to take off his jumper))
12 Ms. Leigh: (so he had to make sure
13 Karen and Olivia
14 ((begins listing on fingers))
15 that he wasn’t missing out any words (.)
16 and he had to make sure as well
17 that he was adding enough detailed description
18 to give us some idea (.)
19 about what was going on (.)
20 OK let’s see
21 marks out of 10
22 and a reason for why please
23 . ((3 minutes later—Harry has read out the second
24 version of his story and the students have discussed it
25 in pairs))

101 Ms. Leigh: fingers up
102 i:n
103 5 seconds
104 to show me how many marks out of 10
105 you think this one is worth
106 so in 5 seconds you’re going to hold up
107 ((holds up 1 finger))
108 1 finger if you think it’s only 1 out of 10
109 ((holds up 10 fingers)) 10 out of 10
110 ((holds up 7 fingers)) 7 out of 10
111 > ready five four <
112 everyone should have their fingers up with a decision
113 three (2)
114 two one zero
115 ((Students raise hands to illustrate score))
116 Harry: 10
117 Ms. Leigh: oo OK
119 Harry: I have a 9 over there
120 that’s good
121 I have a 9
122 William: [and you’ve got a 9 next to you (xxxxx)((pointing))
123 Harry: [er I have a 9
124 I have a 9
125 Student: dude you have a 10
126 Harry: a 10 where
127 we have a 10
128 Ms. Leigh: OK Harry
129 I want you to pick three separate numbers
130 and ask them to explain why
131 ((Harry stands up out of his seat))
132 Harry: excuse me
133 explain why you’ve only give me a 5
134 William: because
Students:  
((laughter))

((most students put down their hands))

William: because in the first story you

you had more descriptive (.) words

and you didn't ex-

in the second story you didn't [explain the:

Julie: [to neighbouring student] [xxxxxxxxxx)

William: man who was changing the weather

and

the characters (.)

and

in the other one-

because in the first one you had (.)

better descriptive words

in that one you had more

Harry: [leaning forward] d-

Ms. Leigh: Julie what were you going to say because you-

I could see you ((makes whispering noise))

on the back there

Julie: yeah like because h- the better-

the first one was better because he had like

more descriptive words

but in that one he didn't like

describe the:

person who was changing the weather much

Harry: because I didn't get that far though

I didn't get that far

[(so it's like-)

Ms. Leigh: [Tamara

what did you think about

the quality of the words that he used

Tamara: they were quite good

but (2)

he could've used like more descriptive words

Ms. Leigh: give me an example

Tamara: like (2)

some xxxxxx)

Ms. Leigh: (come on) William you've spoken now

so for example

my personal choice

I really liked er:

scalding ((pointing out words on the whiteboard))

er blazed

peaceful

placid

and there's another one

[obscuring

Student: [what does placid mean

Ms. Leigh: calm

radiance

I thought actually the word choices were very advanced

what would you have preferred to have seen

Student: obscuring

Tamara: erm more like (.)

I don't know really

it's just hard to explain

Ms. Leigh: OK

Harry: you can say it's rubbish

I don't mind

Ms. Leigh: would you say that

Tamara: no

Ms. Leigh: why not

Tamara: because he's still got loads of really good words and

(1)

(no xxxxxx)

Ms. Leigh: sorry could you speak up

no:
Ms. Leigh: the reason that I’m asking you is because I know that you’re very similar to Harry in the words that you choose for your writing comes out of a lot of the books that you read you actually you’ve both got very good vocabularies so you choose very good words to put into your work. and you’ve gone from having a clear description that everyone understood to actually having a very extended vocabulary so:

Ms. Leigh: I was very pleased with the words that you chose maybe you need to kind of do a little bit well like you said there you’ve only got towards the section with the characters when you talked about erm Scarlet and was it her hair

Ms. Leigh: that was ideal for the description wouldn’t you say ((pointing at Tamara))

Ms. Leigh: why

Ms. Leigh: so hers was ((reading from text)) bellowed Scarlett

Ms. Leigh: her simply put up hair

Ms. Leigh: brushing to the side because of the cold breeze so it actually tells us more about the character there rather than just saying she’s got hair it’s tells us (what it was like)

Ms. Leigh: OK Callum what did you give-

Ms. Leigh: I shouldn’t do that should I

Harry: you had two more choices for people who gave you marks

Gina: well because the description was really good and (...) erm instead of using like just hot and sunny

Gina: you actually use- used like scalding heat blazed and it was really good description and it was very very like like it was like level 4 or 5 in vocabulary because it was really really good and erm the way you described Scarlett was really really good

Ms. Leigh: why

Gina: what did it do for you as a reader because it makes you think (...) that she like she’s really nice and pretty and erm you- you want to: know more about her because erm like you’ve described her so well

Ms. Leigh: excellent

Gina: that good description has to give the reader a clear picture inside their mind
when I read erm William's story
I knew what was going to happen
because we planned it together
and when I actually read it
it didn't-
he told me he was going to:
go into a tunnel of the inky blackness (.)
and then I found out nothing else
I didn't know if it was a stone tunnel
a concrete tunnel
I didn't know if it was a soil tunnel
because he didn't have that description through there
so using those descriptive words
to give a picture to the reader
right Harry we've had
a girl and a boy
so now somebody else who's given you
not a 10 out of 10
not a 5 out of 10
[come on, who's going to give Harry some honest feedback
((Callum changes from 6 fingers to 4))
Callum: me ((moves hand in Harry's direction))
Harry: er ((looks around the room))
William: 4 ((points to Callum's hand))
(2)
Harry: Callum go on then
why did you give me a 4
Callum: er well like
you never really explained as much
[as like the first one
((Rachel and William raise their hands))
Harry: I didn't get up to there [people
Callum: [yeah but you c-
(2)
OK
you could have like done the characters
like you and the teacher or whatever you were
[or was you even in it
Harry: [(looks back at first version of story on his desk)]
[oh you mean describe the teacher [and stuff
Callum: [yeah
Harry: aw right yeah
William: [(changes from one raised hand to another)]
((to Ms. Leigh)) I've just got a comment
Ms. Leigh: [(to William)] hold on one second
((to Harry)) do you agree
Harry: yeah I-
yeah I- I guess so
I missed out-
all I said is he had a quiet voice and that's all so
I suppose I could have described him a bit better
like that he had a like
that he had erm (.) thick glasses
erm neatly- neatly thingy
side-partin martin
and stuff
Students: [(Laughter)]
Ms. Leigh: OK
using that simple phrase here
Scarlett her simply put up hair
gives me lots of details about Scarlett
because now I can see Scarlett inside my head
her hair's put up
so maybe she's one of these people
that likes to be able to
run around without having to spend lots time touching her hair and checking she looks right in the reflection you know it tells me that she’s a person that’s maybe clean tidy organized efficient it’s simply put up but she looks quite attractive so she cares about her appearance but not enough to be vain so a simple phrase like that actually helps to give you lots of character details if you’d have said erm the teacher’s placid voice it tells you straight away using the word placid it tells you that actually the teacher’s nice and calm just like me hey Callum

William & Callum: 
((Laughter))

Ms. Leigh: if you said

the teacher’s placid voice droning on as usual it would have told you two things calm but also really quite boring not like me hey Callum

William & Callum: 
((Laughter))

Ms. Leigh: 
so

using those little character phrases 

does help you to give you detail 

OK Karen you haven’t had much to say today

Karen: 

well I like the speech tags (1) I like the adverbs

Ms. Leigh: 

OK tell me well tell us what you mean by speech tags because I always say don’t forget your speech tags and you go

Karen: 

erm

Ms. Leigh: 

OK I’ll come to you in a second

Karen: 

bellowed

Ms. Leigh: 

yep definitely

bellowed and that’s not just a

((said quietly)) what are you doing

or a

((louder and sterner)) what are you doing

or a

((shouting)) what are you doing

Students: 

((Laughter))

William: 

[what are you doing

Ms. Leigh: 

[xxxxxxxxxxxxx isn’t it

it shows you how it’s being said that’s what we mean by speech tags OK I’ll come to you in a second
hands down because we're going to run out of time in a moment
we're thinking about our stories today then
Harry we could've-
do we all generally agree
his story improved from yesterday
Students: yeah
William: 
Ms. Leigh: oh that's nice
Students: a big round of applause for Harry
((Clapping))
Harry: should I bow
Ms. Leigh: pardon
Harry: should I bow
Ms. Leigh: no
Students: 
((Laughter))
Ms. Leigh: 
right
so what you're going to do with your partner is