

Symposium

Title: Nordic inquiry in Quality Literature Education: Danish, Swedish and Norwegian teachers' enactments, adaptations and understandings across national contexts

Organizers: Nikolaj Elf & Vibeke Christensen, both at University of Southern Denmark

Abstract describing the entire symposium / introductory paper.

Building on a prior large-scale intervention focusing on literature education in a Danish context (Hansen et al 2019), the QUINT sub-study Quality Literature Education (QUALE) is a qualitative multiple case study investigating what local transformations of a learning resource designed for inquiry-oriented literature education tell us about inquiry-oriented teaching across Nordic countries. More specifically, we ask 1) how students and teachers enact, adapt and understand inquiry-oriented/based literature teaching, 2) which contextual factors co-shape the transformations, and 3) what the conditions are for inquiry-oriented teaching in the Nordic countries.

As such, QUALE contributes to the multidimensional exploration of quality teaching focusing on subject- and domain specific perspectives (Elf, 2021). Drawing on pragmatic and phenomenological aesthetic theory (Dewey, 2005 [1934]) as well as more recent sociocultural and socio-cognitive studies on inquiry teaching, QUALE builds on the pillars of a subject- and domain-specific program theory about quality literature education, which represents the advanced and specific theory of quality teaching within a subject domain (Hansen, 2023; Hansen et al., 2019).

QUALE's design comprises pilot and intervention as well as 'Nordic inquiry' phases. In this symposium, we focus on analyses and preliminary findings from the Intervention and Nordic Inquiry phases. In the Intervention phase, data consists of classroom observation, observation of students group work, individual interviews with teachers and group interviews with students. In the Nordic inquiry phase, we brought together eight participating teachers and researchers for a 2-days participatory research session which worked as a communicative space (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005; Kemmis et al., 2014) for exploring teachers' self-reported enactments, adaptations and understandings of the learning resource, and how they, and we as researchers, understood similarities and differences in practices across the three Scandinavian school cases. Specifically, in the Nordic inquiry phase, teachers were asked to reflect on the QUALE conceptualization of didactic principles and strategies, as well as how they understood how contextual aspects such as school leadership and national steering documents co-shaped their enactments, adaptations and practices. We also asked teachers, in a so-called 'Future workshop', to further develop their literature teaching sketching future teaching informed by QUALE, but using new texts teachers preferred. Two of the teachers participating in the Nordic inquiry session will also participate in and contribute to this symposium, and all teachers contribute to the analyses and inferences of preliminary findings and implications.

Preliminary findings suggest that regardless of school context, the offered learning resource and the general concept of inquiry-oriented teaching informing the resource, is interpreted in very positive terms and considered highly useful for improving the quality of literature education that include all students. Findings offer cross-case validation of the research questions and suggest potentials for upscaling the project in national Nordic contexts or as a Nordic large-scale comparative project.

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Paper 1

Inquiry-based literature teaching in a Norwegian classroom - with a teacher's perspective

Ida Gabrielsen, University of Oslo, & participating teacher from Oslo school

Introduction:

In line with the QUINT ambition which aims at understanding teaching quality from multiple perspectives, the QUALE project studies local transformations of a learning resource designed for inquiry-oriented literature education. In addition to exploring how the adaptation and enactment of the learning material unfolds in and across classrooms, we are interested in the 'experienced quality' (Hansen et al. 2019; Elf 2021) of literature education in classroom settings. Therefore, we have focused on both students' and teachers' perceptions and understandings throughout the project.

Aim:

Drawing on data from the Intervention and Nordic inquiry phases, this paper aims to investigate and discuss how and to what extent QUALE's didactical strategies and principles has shaped one teacher's literature instruction, and how the teacher and her students reflect upon questions related to literature education and the use of the inquiry-oriented learning material. In our presentation, one participating teacher, together with one researcher, will present findings from Intervention II in Norway and contextualise these findings with data and analyses developed in Nordic inquiry. We will present empirical examples from the teacher's classrooms, based on both her experiences and the researcher's observations.

Theoretical and methodological framework:

Two teachers from a school in Oslo participated and used the QUALE learning resources in their 9th grade L1-classes, two classes each, during winter 2022/23. Data consists of classroom observation, observation of students group work, individual interviews with teachers and group interviews with students. Qualitative thematic analyses are being conducted.

Preliminary results and significance:

Preliminary findings suggest that teachers and students experienced a shift from a rigid focus on generic genre knowledge and features, to a more text and student-oriented literature instruction. Furthermore, the teachers are content with what they call an encouragement to “read more and deeper” in the new Norwegian L1 curriculum, and that this harmonizes well with QUALE’s didactical strategies and principles.

Relevance to the QUINT ambition:

The study taps into QUINT’s ambition to bring together theoretical developments of the notion of quality teaching with actual teachers’ practices and practice development across Nordic countries. The broader purpose is to investigate whether a Nordic model of such practice development could be developed.

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Paper 2

How do teachers understand the strategies and didactic principles in inquiry-based literature education? A comparative study validating QUALE across three countries

Nikolaj Elf, Vibeke Christensen & participating Danish teacher Louise Petersen

Introduction:

The concept of inquiry-oriented literature education has been developed, designed, and tried out as a large-scale intervention in the Danish lower secondary school (Hansen et al., 2029). The intervention found, among other things, increased participation in literacy conversations and increased interpretive competence for all student groups (Hansen, Elf, Misfeldt, Gissel, &

Lindhardt, 2020). Furthermore, it revealed the changing role of both teachers and students and the opportunities and challenges associated with this (Christensen & Høegh, 2021).

Aim:

In this presentation, we focus on two aspects of the inquiry-based literature education, more specifically eight 'didactic principles' and seven inquiry-oriented 'strategies' informing the concept, asking: How do teachers in Sweden, Norway and Denmark enact, adapt and understand inquiry-based literature teaching?

Theoretical and methodological framework:

The study is conducted as a holistic multiple case study (Yin, 2012) conducted as a small-scale experiment in a Norwegian, a Swedish and two Danish schools. The interventions in the classes were guided by a digital teaching material and afterwards, the participating eight teachers and eight researchers met at a two-day seminar and discussed the experience, understanding, and practicing of inquiry-based literature education. The seminar established a communicative space (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005) for investigating the initiative from the perspective of practitioners and researchers. Data for this presentation comprises two group dialogues on the experiences with the strategies and two group dialogues on the experiences with the didactic principles. All dialogues were guided by open-ended questions. In total, the data consists of 190 minutes of conversation. In time of writing, we just finished the seminar, but plan to analyze the data with respect to four categories: teacher understandings, adaptations, possibilities and limitations.

Preliminary results and significance:

The preliminary findings indicate a validation of the findings of the large-scale Danish intervention project, while also offering new contextually shaped understandings and adaptations. The so-called 'experience strategy' emphasizing bodily experience and first-order knowledge is found to be central amongst teachers and is in opposition to the usual practice, which is characterized by secondary knowledge before reading (Hansen 2023). The choice of texts and the open and curious dialogue on the meaning of the text is pivotal and challenging for the teachers. The strategies Discovery, Metacognition and Elaboration seem difficult to distinguish, yet can be made meaningful in practice. In two areas differences emerge: 1) The use of technology varies as some classes read on screen, while others read only printed texts; 2) the form of the exam seems to have an influence on the teaching and thus also the difference between the usual teaching and the inquiry-based teaching. This relationship calls for further investigation.

Relevance to the QUINT ambition:

The inquiry-based literature education supplements the existing knowledge about reading and reading comprehension in general with knowledge on strategies for reading and interpreting aesthetic texts. Furthermore, it represents an alternative literature didactics that seem to benefit all groups of students, regardless of their academic, social background and ethnic background. In a wider perspective, it could be argued to support students' Bildung processes through literature reading. As such, it represents a common Nordic understanding of the purpose of the compulsory school.

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Paper 3

Ane Qvortrup, University of Southern Denmark, & Thomas Illum Hansen, University College UCL, Denmark

Comparative analysis of the role of Nordic governance traditions and school perceptions in the development of progressive inquiry based teaching

Introduction:

The Nordic model, characterized as a social democratic welfare approach, where principles of inclusion, student-centeredness and equality are key values ([1], [10], [3]) has been seen as a role model for educational interests and governance internationally ([6]). However, the Nordic model is sometimes argued as being almost a myth ([1]) or an unjustified idea of exceptionalism ([2]). It is suggested that a development with larger differences between the countries over time makes it difficult to talk about a Nordic model ([4], [3], [7], [10]).

Aims:

This paper discusses the Nordic educational model based on three Nordic comparative cases focusing on teachers experiences of implementing inquiry based approaches in lower secondary L1-classrooms and of inhibiting and promoting factors in the classroom, among colleagues, in curricula and exams forms and in municipal and national administration and government. Inquiry based approaches are relevant as focus for an investigation of educational similarities and differences between the Nordic countries, as inquiry based teaching in recent years has been a common Nordic focus in research, theory as well as in policy and practice. The aim is to gain deeper insight into the constitutive conditions for implementation of inquiry-based literature teaching in three Nordic countries.

Theoretical and methodological framework:

Referring to previous models for comparing generic or subject specific didactic core elements and newer studies in comparative didactics ([13], [9], [12], [8], [5]), this paper suggests a thematic model for comparing teaching across contexts, differentiating between didactic practice (the actions carried out by the teacher to promote a certain aim), didactic reality (the frameworks, principles and laws in a given context) and didactic theory (the history of theory that helps to create a space for action).

The empirical material for the paper include curricula, classroom observations and focus group interviews with teachers. We develop an analysis matrix on the basis of traditions for comparative analysis of politico-administrative systems and of curricular similarities and differences ([11]).

Preliminary results and significance:

At the time of writing, the analysis is not conducted yet. The results will be presented at the conference. We expect to find differences in experiences implementing inquiry based approaches and of inhibiting and promoting factors. We discuss the results of the analyses, focusing on how they relate to national and Nordic traditions. The paper contributes to a more holistic approach to discussing connections across the levels in our analysis matrix, which, among other things, can influence school governance and curriculum development.

Relevance to the QUINT ambition:

The comparative analysis of the Nordic governance traditions and school perceptions contributes to the QUINT ambition by elucidating essential constitutive factors for interpretation and discussion of what quality is in teaching. Progressive and inquiry-based forms of teaching are often emphasized because of their qualities in relation to the desire to promote students' innovative competences. The comparative analysis functions as reflection on the governance realities.

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Extended summary

Building on a prior large-scale intervention focusing on literature education in a Danish context, the so-called KiDM project (which stands for Kvalitet i Dansk og Matematik (Hansen et al 2019)) involving 150 schools and more than 10000 students, the QUINT sub-study Quality Literature Education (QUALE) is a small-scale, qualitative, comparative multiple case study investigating what local transformations of KiDM learning resources designed for inquiry-oriented literature education tell us about inquiry-oriented teaching across Nordic countries. More specifically, QUALE asks 1) how students and teachers enact, adapt and understand inquiry-oriented/based literature teaching, 2) which contextual factors co-shape the transformations, and 3) what the conditions are for inquiry-oriented teaching in the Nordic countries.

Both KiDM and QUALE explore the prescriptive, experienced and documented qualities (Illum Hansen et al. 2019; Elf, 2022) of inquiry-oriented literature teaching in Language arts/L1 contexts emphasizing role of teacher agency, and how teachers could help revising a model for inquiry-oriented literature teaching, as modelled in figure 1 below (Illum Hansen et al. 2019, p. 13; 15).

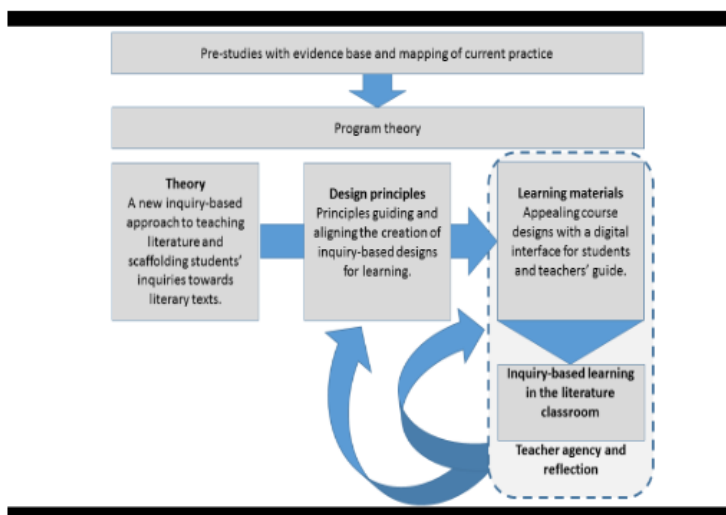


Figure 1. Dynamics in KiDM and QUALE's research designs.

As such, KiDM and QUALE contributes to the multidimensional exploration of quality teaching focusing on subject- and domain specific perspectives (Elf, 2021). Drawing on pragmatic and phenomenological aesthetic theory (Dewey, 2005 [1934]) as well as more recent sociocultural and socio-cognitive studies on inquiry teaching, QUALE builds on the pillars of KiDM's subject- and domain-specific program theory about quality literature education, which represents the advanced and specific theory of quality teaching within a subject domain (Hansen, 2023; Hansen et al., 2019).

Considering the comparative aspect across national contexts, we hypothesize that the conditions for carrying out inquiry-oriented literature teaching in preference to the usual literature teaching, do not only exist in the classroom between teacher and students, but also in contextual circumstances. We are differentiating between didactic practice (the actions carried out by the teacher to promote a certain aim), didactic reality (the frameworks, principles and laws in a given context) and didactic theory (the history of theory that helps to create a space for action) (Winther-Jensen 2004; O'Dowd, M.; Winther-Jensen, T. & Wikander, L. 2015).

QUALE's design comprises Organization, Pilot, two intervention as well as 'Nordic inquiry' phases, as represented in figure 2.

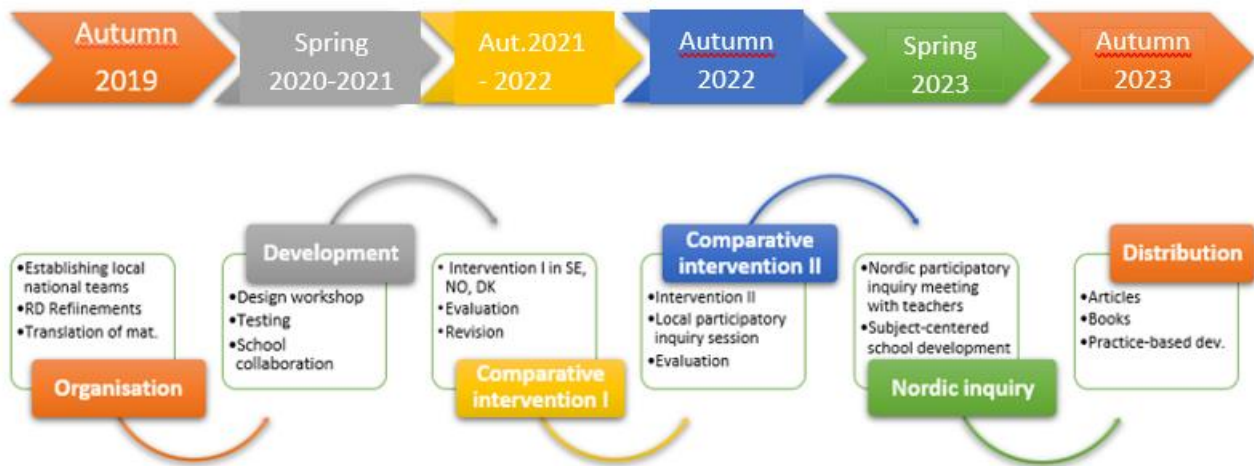


Figure 2. The Design Phases of QUALE.

In this symposium, we focus on analyses and preliminary findings from the Intervention and Nordic Inquiry phases. In the Intervention phase, data consists of classroom observation, observation of students group work, individual interviews with teachers and group interviews with students. In the Nordic inquiry phase, we brought together eight participating teachers and researchers for a 2-days participatory research session which worked as a communicative space (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005; Kemmis et al., 2014) for exploring teachers' self-reported enactments, adaptations and understandings of the learning resource, and how they, and we as researchers, understood similarities and differences in practices across the three Scandinavian school cases. Specifically, in the Nordic inquiry phase, teachers were asked to reflect on the QUALE program theory emphasizing *didactic principles* (table 1 below) and a model for *literature inquiry strategies* (figure 3 below), as well as how they understood how contextual aspects such as school leadership and national steering documents co-shaped their enactments, adaptations and practices. Furthermore, during the Nordic Inquiry phase, we also asked teachers, in a 'Future workshop', to further develop their literature teaching sketching future teaching informed by QUALE, but using new texts teachers preferred. Two of the teachers participating in the Nordic inquiry session will also participate in and contribute to this symposium, and all teachers contribute to the analyses and inferences of preliminary findings and implications.

<p>1. Commitment</p> <p>Texts and courses must engage students by making room for experience, challenge, preoccupation, and initiative, both towards the L1 subject, socially, and personally.</p>
<p>2. Dialogic community</p> <p>Students should have the opportunity to work with their own experiences of texts as a starting point for analysis and interpretation in a dialogic community, characterized by active listening and exploratory talks.</p>
<p>3. Inquiry-oriented courses</p> <p>Teaching is organized in inquiry-based courses that do not close in on theme, genre, historical transmission, and narrow goal orientation, but open up for students' own inquiries.</p>
<p>4. Guided openness</p> <p>Teacher presentation, tasks, and questions are formulated from a deep understanding of the texts and every single text's distinctive traits, so that teaching becomes neither too open nor too closed, but creates a guided openness in the tension field between the texts' structuring elements and blanks.</p>
<p>5. Intellectual framing</p> <p>Students receive direct instruction in terms and strategies that make them capable of independently examining aesthetic texts and to be reflective towards their work and learning outcome.</p>
<p>6. Varied progression</p> <p>Courses and tasks are varied and goal-oriented to make teaching dynamically alternate between in-depth analysis, skill training, and perspectivation to the world outside the texts.</p>
<p>7. Multimodal production</p> <p>Creative production combining different ways of making meaning (multimodality), for example using body, speech, writing, sound, image, and diagrams, make students' work with texts concrete and creative.</p>
<p>8. Mastery of interpretation</p> <p>Teachers' and instructional materials' examples and model analysis illustrate how to fill out blanks, i.e. have a concrete perception of the implicit parts of the text, how to expand understanding of the text, and master an inquiry-based approach.</p>

Table 1. Didactic principles informing QUALE, see Illum Hansen et al. 2019, p. 13

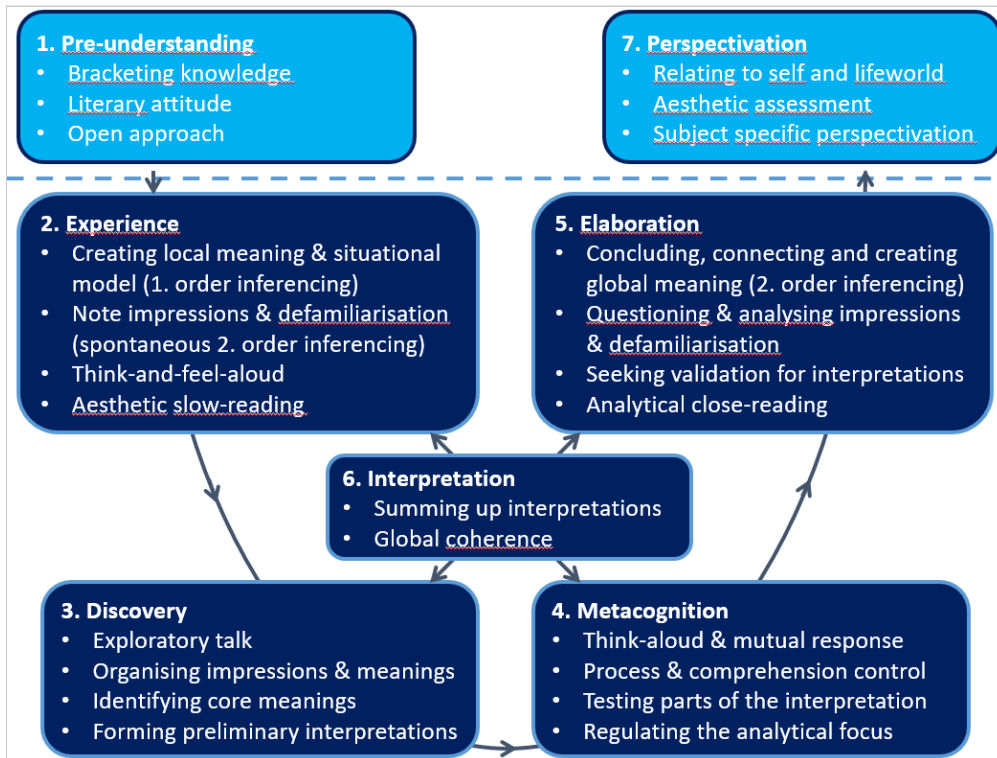


Figure 3. Hansen et al. 2019, p. 18, see also Hansen 2023.

Preliminary findings suggest that regardless of school context, the offered learning resource and the general concept of inquiry-oriented teaching informing the resource, is interpreted in very positive terms and rendered highly useful for improving the quality of a literature education that would include all students. We also find that the selections of texts are central, as is the students' experiential first encounter with the text, which can be guided through 'steered openness'. Furthermore, the open dialogue about the meaning of the text is crucial, but also difficult to maintain. All groups of students benefit from the inquiry-oriented teaching and an only limited resistance to the teaching is also found in all student groups. Important conditions for inquiry-oriented teaching seems to be the weighting and understanding of literature in the curriculum, the current evaluation culture, and the form of the final exam.

For discussion, we argue that findings offer cross-case validation of the research questions and suggest potentials for upscaling the project in national Nordic contexts or as a Nordic large-scale comparative project. Considering currently implemented policies in Norwegian and Swedish contexts, QUALE has much to offer in terms of bringing policy into practice acknowledging the specificities of national conditions and local schools.

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