Literature Instruction in Nordic Schools

Anna Nissen, Mid-term evaluation

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I am working on a compilation thesis about literature instruction in Nordic lower Secondary Schools. These are the texts that I have written for my mid-term evaluation. They are all included in this Pdf.

1. Extended abstract (Introduction, Theoretical background, Methods and Summaries of my two first articles.) This text will have to be developed, elaborated and expanded.
2. *Function and Use of Literary Texts in Nordic Schools* This article has been published in *L1 Educational Studies in Language and Literature.*
3. *Cognitive Activation as an Aspect of Literature Instruction* This article is in review.
4. *Talking about Literature* This is the first part of an article that I have recently started working with. So far, no analyses have been performed.

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Förord

Här skriver författaren sitt eventuella förord och tackar alla som hjälpt till. Om någon annan skrivit ett förord placeras det före innehållsförteckningen och ingår då inte som en rubrik i innehållsförteckningen till skillnad från författarens förord.

Introduction

This compilation thesis intends to examine how Nordic lower secondary teachers use literary texts in their instruction, and to investigate and assess the teaching quality in Nordic literature instruction. Traditionally, literature has played an important part in language arts instruction in these countries, and although literary texts may have lost some of their previous status, they are still emphasized and given prominence in all Nordic curricula (Gourvennec et al., 2020; Ministry of Education Science and Culture, 2014). In Danish, Finnish, Norwegian and Swedish lower secondary language arts instruction, literature can be treated in two different and competing ways; either as "texts like any other texts with no particular potential compared with other types of texts", or as "exceptional texts with the potential to provide something that other texts cannot" (Gourvennec et al., 2020, p. 26). My own assumption is that, although literary texts are sometimes read and used for pragmatic reasons, they possess qualities that make them different from other kinds of texts. Therefore, I am interested in if, how and to what extent it makes a difference that teachers choose and use literature (rather than other kinds of texts) in their instruction.

There are many different genres, and it is certainly important and relevant that young people meet various kinds of texts in order to develop their reading literacy. These texts can be fictional as well as non-fictional. There are, however, several reasons why I have chosen to focus on literary texts, and why I find it beneficial for students to work with literature in school. For instance, literary texts demand interpretation, and therefore readers of literature are required to develop their critical thinking as well as their imagination. During the reading process, the text and its reader co-create meaning (Iser, 1978), and since a person's interpretation and understanding of a literary text depend on his or her own experiences, it is valuable to discuss fiction with others (Langer, 2011). Reading and responding to literature may help students develop an understanding of other people and their conditions, and thus contribute to their personal development and growth (Schrijvers et al., 2016). This idea is supported by Nordic language arts curricula (Gourvennec et al., 2020), but some scholars emphasize the value of reading literature in its own right, and oppose the use of literature for some kind of predetermined purpose (e.g., to examine ethical, existential, social or historical issues) (Thavenius, 2017). However, as Thavenius (2017) points out, even when a literary text is used as a means to teach students factual knowledge, it is not necessarily read and understood in the same way as a non-fiction text.

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Teachers play an important role when students get to know literature, and when they develop their understanding of how literary texts are to be read. When deciding which texts to include in their instruction, and how to work with them, teachers shape their students' literary competence, and teach them what to pay attention to when reading literature. This is why *what questions* teachers ask, and *what answers* they accept, make a difference (Hetmar, 1996). In sum, it can be argued that teachers' choices of literary texts, as well as their choices of methods, indicate what kind of literary competence is expected and valued within a certain context.

It is difficult to define what constitutes literary competence, especially since it differs across context and time (Culler, 1993). For example, many methods and analytical approaches that are used when literature is studied at the university are difficult to use when working with younger students, and in teacher training, other kinds of discourses and ideologies related to literature are expressed than what the language arts curriculum for compulsory school prescribes (Thavenius, 2017). However, teacher training, curricula, textbooks and (national) traditions can be understood as aspects that have an impact on how teachers treat literature, and how they, implicitly or explicitly, understand literary competence. Thus, when observing naturally occurring literature instruction, it is possible to draw conclusions about how language arts teachers comprehend and teach literary competence, and to notice similarities and differences across classrooms. In the present study, I take a Nordic perspective, which is valuable since it helps me identify patterns and features that might have been difficult to discover within a national context. The Nordic perspective helps me challenge and question my own preconceptions about literature instruction and literary competence. In sum, this implies that I will not only be able to contribute with new knowledge about how Nordic teachers use literature in their instruction; I will also be able to add to the discussion about what constitutes *high quality literature instruction*.

Aim and Research Questions

The overall aim of my PhD project is to examine how Nordic lower secondary language arts teachers make use of literary texts in their everyday instruction. The following research questions will guide my study.

1. For what subject-specific functions and purposes are literary texts read and worked upon in Finnish, Icelandic, Norwegian and Swedish lower secondary classrooms? To what extent are different literary genres

included in the instruction?

2. How cognitively activating are tasks that students are assigned in Swedish and Norwegian lower secondary literature instruction? How and to what extent do teachers increase or decrease these tasks' cognitive activation potential?

3. How do Swedish and Norwegian teachers and students co-construct meaning and understanding in whole-class discussions about literary texts? What kinds of perspectives guide the interpretation and understanding of these texts?

4. How do Nordic language arts teachers describe their own literature instruction?

5. How, and to what extent, do Nordic teachers consider and utilize the fact they use literary texts (and not other kinds of texts) in their instruction?

Research questions 1 – 4 target individual articles, whereas the last one will help me link the different articles to each other. In addition to this, it puts an emphasis on the fact that literary texts differ from other kinds of texts, for instance in that they are open for interpretation.

Background

Nordic Literature Instruction: An Overview

To be written...

International Comparisons of Literature Instruction

This section will have to be revised and developed.

When comparing teachers' instructions across boarders and traditions, it is possible to notice characteristics that are difficult to discern when national practices are investigated. This is an important reason why it is productive to study literature instruction in a Nordic context. Although large-scale assessments like PISA[1] compare students' achievement on an international level, research within the educational field has previously been dominated by small-scale studies based on various methodological and theoretical approaches (Klette et al., 2017). Klette et al. (2017) argues that even though these studies

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[1] Programme for International Student Assessment

have contributed with useful information about classroom practices, it has been difficult to compare them to each other. However, based on the fact that Nordic countries share social, linguistic, and educational commonalities (Klette, 2018) many similarities can be expected when language arts instruction in these countries is compared.

Although comparative studies investigating literature instruction are rare, there are a number of examples which indicate that different traditions influence how literature is read and interpreted. For instance, Torell (2002) found that readers from Russian, Swedish and Finnish school cultures used completely different strategies when interpreting previously unknown literary texts. Whereas Russian teacher students tended to use literary concepts, and search for a deeper meaning in the text, Swedish and Finnish students used strategies that limited them and lead them only to see things in the texts that they already knew before they started reading.

In a more recent study, Johansson (2015) compared how Swedish and French upper secondary students interpreted a short story. She found that education-related aspects might have an impact on how students respond to literary texts. When interpreting the short story, the French students, who were educated in a system inspired by structuralism and formalism, primarily focused on structures and techniques, whereas the Swedish students, who were fostered into emotional and experience-based reading, frequently associated to their own experiences. Johansson (2015) could draw the conclusion that although emotional reading can give life to a story, there is a risk that it affects the comprehension of the text in a negative way.

There is a limited number of studies investigating and comparing literature instruction in a Nordic context, but based on 26 interviews with teachers teaching language arts in Swedish, Norwegian and Danish upper secondary schools, Penne (2012) could draw the conclusion that many Scandinavian teachers face similar problems in their teaching practice. For instance, they frequently meet students who are not used to reading advanced texts and who are not interested in literature. Therefore, these teacher often choose literary texts that their students actually like, and that present situations where students can recognize themselves and their own lives. Scandinavian teachers also strive to create positive experiences through reading, and students' individual interpretations are by and large respected (Penne, 2012).

Also, Nordic teachers' basis for the legitimation of their subject (i.e. language arts) seem to be very much the same, at least in Sweden, Norway and Denmark (Ulfgard, 2012). In interviews, 18 upper secondary teachers (six

teachers from each of the three countries) point out reading literature and developing linguistic skills as two key areas of the subject. Communication, reflection and personality development are another three issues that are considered important (Ulfgard, 2012).

Theoretical background

In the articles that make up this thesis, I use different theoretical frameworks, which will be described in the individual articles. However, what unites these articles is the fact that they all describe how lower secondary teachers use literature in their instruction. What teacher choose to focus on, as well as their choices of texts and methods, are built on some kind of understanding (based on e.g. traditions and national curricula) of what literature instruction ought to include. When students work with literary texts in school, they develop some kind of literary competence, which presumably differ across contexts and settings. This is why it is important to discuss and define how literary competence can be understood, but also how teachers can teach literature and literary competence to their students.

Literary Competence

To be able to perceive a certain text as literature, readers must possess an implicit understanding of how literary texts are to be read. This is why they necessarily need some kind of literary competence. Although it is difficult to define *literary competence*, it can be understood as a set of conventions that is used when literary texts are read (Culler, 1993). These conventions change over time, and as old conventions regarding our ways of reading literature are rejected, new ones are developed. As a consequence, our ways of reading and understanding literature change (Culler, 1993). Although every text is unique and different from other texts, it also contains links to other, generically similar texts. Therefore, it is valuable for readers to pay attention to the specificities of a particular text, as well as to its connections to other, similar texts (Rabinowitz & Bancroft, 2014). Studying *one* text (e.g., a novel) teaches the reader how to read a certain kind of text, and makes it easier to read and understand other texts from the same genre (Culler, 1993).

In a literary text, everything is not explicitly revealed, but there are multiple "gaps". Iser (1978) claims that "…it is the gaps, the fundamental asymmetry between text and reader, that give rise to communication in the reading process" (p 167). According to Iser (1978), gaps in texts are central for the whole text-reader relationship; the communication between text and reader

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cannot be successful unless the reader's activity is controlled in some way by the text. When a literary text is interpreted, the role prescribed by the text will necessarily be very strong. Yet, the reader's own disposition and personal experiences will never completely disappear. Rather, such aspects form a reference that helps the reader comprehend the text (Iser, 1978).

Interpreting literary texts is a complex matter. When reading literature, it is necessary to pay attention to the author's clues about characters and motifs, and to organize and interpret these clues. Although readers' individual assumptions form a basis for their interpretations, it is important neither to ignore aspects mentioned in the text, nor to add ideas that the text cannot justify (Rosenblatt, 2002). In contexts where a subjective "reader-response" approach is predominant, and where the concreate features of texts are ignored, there is a risk that readers overlook real and important limitations to interpretation. However, interpretation necessarily involves prior knowledge of convention that the text itself does not explicitly include but, nevertheless, infer (Rabinowitz & Bancroft, 2014).

Rosenblatt (2002) claims that, when literary texts are read, there is a unique transaction between the reader and the text. This two-way reciprocity between the text and the reader (where both parts are equally important) can explain why "meaning" cannot be found neither in the text, nor in the reader. Iser (1978) points out that the meaning of a literary text is not a definable and precise entity, but rather a dynamic experience. We may say that literary works have two different poles, an artistic and an aesthetic (Iser, 1978). Whereas the artistic pole is the author's texts, the aesthetic pole is the reader's realization of it. However, the literary work itself is not identical to any of these poles. Rather, it is situated somewhere between the two extremes (Iser, 1978). Iser (1978) explains that the interaction between a literary text and its reader is fundamental. When a literary text is read, there is an interaction going on between the structure of the text and its recipient. During the reading process, the reader unfolds a network of possible connections, from which he makes a selection. One of the factors governing this selection is the fact that, when we read, we think the thoughts of another person. Some of these thoughts might represent unfamiliar experiences, and contain elements that appear to be inaccessible for us. However, according to Iser (1978), our selection tends to be guided by parts of the experience that seem to be familiar to us.

Since readers may interpret literary texts in very different ways, it is difficult, sometimes even impossible, to agree upon what is the "correct" understanding of a literary text (Culler, 1993). Especially when it comes to

complex texts, they involve a complex web of meanings, which often compete with each other. Therefore, a literary text cannot be said to have one single meaning (Rabinowitz & Bancroft, 2014). Yet, although a literary text can have multiple understandings, it cannot have any understanding (Culler, 1993). Readers do not necessarily have to come to an agreement about what is the correct interpretation, but there are conventions guiding their reading of different literary genres, and these conventions put limits to the number of acceptable and plausible interpretations. Experienced readers of literature develop a sense for what can be done with literary works, and in this way they incorporate a system that is more or less interpersonal (Culler, 1993). An acceptable understanding of a literary text is not equal to the reader's spontaneous reactions to the text, but an understanding that can be regarded as credible and righteous when it is explained (Culler, 1993).

Teaching Literature and Literary Competence

Teachers decide the course of literature instruction when they introduce different literary texts, choose teaching methods, and use literary concepts (Hetmar, 1996). When deciding *what* subject content is suitable to convey to students, as well as *how* this should be done, teachers must decide what is the most suitable way to bring about an understanding of a literary text. It is important that students find that their own knowledge and competence are valuable, and that they perceive the literary text interesting and relevant (Hetmar, 1996). In literature instruction, it is important that students feel that they can contribute with their own ideas and understandings. Then their literary competence becomes visible for themselves as well as for others (Hetmar, 1996). In my understanding, this applies to situations where there is an oral communication between teachers and students, as well as to situations where teachers present assignments to their students and let them work on their own, individually or in groups.

Hetmar (1996) suggests four different ways in which teachers can help students understand literary texts. Figure 1 shows how I comprehend these ways, and if teachers and/or students are the ones who primarily control the interpretation and understanding of the texts. The first way implies that the teacher presents his or her own interpretation of a text to their students. The other three ways will be described below.
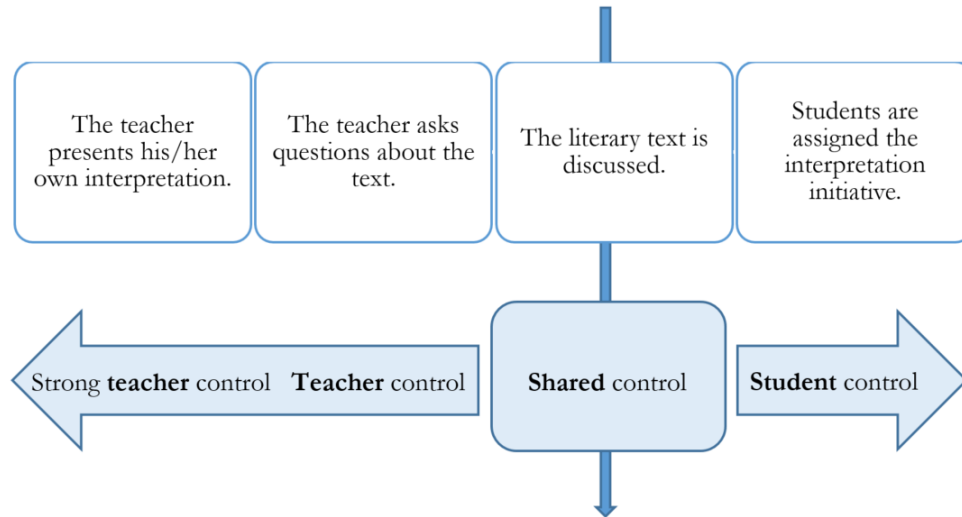
Figure 1 How students can gain an understanding of literary texts (Based on Hetmar, 1996)

Asking Questions about the Text

The second way implies that teachers use questions to guide their students towards a certain understanding of the text, and that they indicate whether the answer is right or wrong, for instance by asking students to go back to the text and show that their understanding is based on what is expressed there. When this practice is used, the teacher is the one who decides what is important, correct, or worth noticing, and his or her feedback and uptake signal if the answer is reasonable, right or wrong (Hetmar, 1996). Since the teacher controls what questions are asked as well as what answers are accepted, this kind of classroom discourse is perceived as monologic (Nystrand et al., 1997).

Literary Discussions

Literary discussions is a third way in which teachers can help their students gain an understanding of a literary text (Hetmar, 1996). In these discussions, factors such as time devoted to discussion, authentic questions, uptake and high-level teacher evaluation can have strong positive effects on student achievement. These features have an impact on the classroom discourse and make it dialogic (Nystrand et al., 1997). Authentic questions have no predefined answers and encourage individual interpretations. They show that the teacher is interested in students' opinions and thoughts, and invite students to contribute with new ideas that can change and modify the discussion. Uptake implies that the teacher picks up on, and elaborates students' contributions to the discussion. In this way, the teacher can validate the response and incorporate it into the discussion (Nystrand et al., 1997).

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Assigning Students the Interpretative Initiative

The fourth way implies that teachers assign students the interpretation initiative. Then students are able to take part of the instruction as active subjects, which is positive. However, the importance of the particular subject and its content may decrease in such situations (Hetmar, 1996).

Although teachers show their students personal respect when they accept all interpretations (sometimes in arbitrary and uncritical ways), this does not mean that they show respect for their literary competence (Hetmar, 1996).

Methods

Classroom observations are valuable since they provide rich information about e.g., teacher classroom behaviour and activities (Dobbelaer, 2019). However, although I have been able to observe a large number of classrooms, this perspective is, nevertheless, limited. This is why I intend to use a survey in order to reach even more (and other) language arts teachers and ask them about their literature instruction. In practice, this means that the individual articles in this thesis will build on two different kinds of data. Three articles will be based on video-data. In the fourth article, I will rely on survey data.

Below, I will describe how data was (or will be) generated, but since I have not started working with the survey, that section will be very short. Three studies (studies one, two and four) will have a quantitative approach, whereas study three will be a qualitative study. In the different articles, I use different ways to analyse my data. Therefore, I will not describe the methods I have used (and will use) for my analyses in the section below.

Video Observations

Three articles will be based on video-data from Linking Instruction and Student Achievement (LISA), which is a project investigating teaching quality in Nordic lower secondary classrooms. In all Nordic countries (Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden), the same research design was used when video data from language arts, mathematics and social science lessons was collected. Consequently, the LISA-material is quite extensive, and although literature instruction does not take place in all classrooms, I have been able to use video data from 102 Finnish, Icelandic, Norwegian and Swedish language arts classrooms. In each classroom, four consecutive lessons were recorded. Therefore, it is possible to follow the same teacher for a number of lessons, which makes it feasible to notice what characterizes individual teachers'

instruction. However, different learning contents might guide teachers' choices and determine what methods they used. Thus, since we only see a small sample of each teacher's instruction, we cannot be sure if the picture we get of it corresponds to their normal teaching. On the other hand, it is valuable to get the opportunity to observe a large number of teachers, who teach in very different ways and who show various levels of teaching quality.

When using video-data, it is important to remember that classroom interaction is very complex. It is not possible for researchers to record more than just a limited sample of what actually goes on in classrooms (Miller & Zhou, 2007). Even when several cameras are used to record multiple hours of instruction, it is impossible to capture all potential perspectives. Although it is possible to systematically observe whatever the cameras have caught, everything that has not been recorded will systematically be neglected (Blikstad-Balas, 2017). Factors such as camera location, camera angles and zooming have an impact on what can be seen (Mondada, 2006). Thus, video recordings only present a limited picture of what goes on in the classroom, which affects and influences the researcher's interpretations and analyses (Dalland, 2011). This is why it is critical that researchers make carefully planned decisions before data is collected (Derry et al., 2010).

When video-data for the LISA-project was recorded, two fixed cameras were used. One camera was placed in the back of the classroom and filmed the teacher, whereas the other one, which was placed in the front of the classroom, simultaneously filmed the students. In this way, activities that went on in the classroom could be captured from two different perspectives. The use of fixed cameras is in line with what Erickson (2006) suggests. He argues that, for research purposes, it is advantageous to use raw video footage that is shot continuously and with little, if any, movements of the camera. This kind of footage is appropriate since it captures social interaction in a neutral way (Erickson, 2006). No active decisions are taken while the footage is shot. Therefore, videos from different classrooms will be comparable, and it will be left to the researcher to interpret them.

When recording audio in the LISA-project, two different microphones were used. One of them was placed on the teacher, and therefore, it is generally quite easy to hear what the teacher says. The other microphone was used to record the whole class and was placed somewhere in the middle of the classroom. Consequently, it is sometimes very hard to hear what individual students say, which can be considered a drawback. However, although a system with one microphone recording the whole class means that some important

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information is left out, it might have been even more troublesome if you could actually hear everything that is said in the classroom. It is, for instance, problematic when the teacher and someone who has a strong voice (and sits close to the microphone) talk simultaneously. If there were microphones that could capture everything uttered in the classroom, it would be very hard to hear what different people say. Depending on what is the aim of a certain study, this problem (i.e., not being able to hear everything that is said) becomes more or less pronounced.

Since video-data is expensive to collect, it can be beneficial to use it in different projects (Derry, 2007). My own PhD project illustrates the fact that it is possible to use the same video-material in a variety of studies. It is used also by other researches linked to the LISA-project, and to Quality in Nordic Teaching (QUINT), which is a Nordic centre of excellence where video-recordings are used to investigate different aspects of teaching quality. Since the video-data that I use in my study had already been recorded by researchers and research assistants before I became a PhD student, I did not, and could not, make any active decisions concerning recording issues. To some extent, this has put limits to my research. For example, when analysing literary discussions, it would have been valuable to include group discussions as well as whole-class discussions, but this was not possible since I could not hear what the students said. Another drawback was that, since I had not visited the classrooms, it was not possible to completely understand the context, (see Dalland, 2011). However, in my case the advantages outweigh the disadvantages. All video-data had been recorded in the same well-planned and consistent way across all classrooms and all countries, and I would certainly not have been able to construct the same amount of data on my own.

Although it is not possible to discern everything that goes on in the classroom, modern video technology makes it feasible to capture and store much of the complexity that is characteristic for teaching and education (Miller & Zhou, 2007). Videotapes contain an abundance of information. Therefore, analysts must develop strategies for focusing attention on some phenomena while simultaneously setting aside others (Erickson, 2006). Such processes of sampling are always, explicitly or implicitly, influenced by theoretical assumptions (Erickson, 2006). Since video recordings are rich in details, it is difficult and time consuming for researchers to turn them into useful data (Derry et al., 2010). This might imply that researchers relying video observations end up only using only a minor part of the collected material, and that they magnify events that are not significant to participants (Blikstad-Balas,

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2017). For researchers, it is also a challenge to represent video data in a way that makes it possible for others to assess whether inferences drawn from it are valid (Blikstad-Balas, 2017). There is also a risk that selection bias increases when researchers select examples from rich case material (such as videos) since the selected cases will be representative of what the viewer sees even if they are actually not representative of what the researcher saw (Miller & Zhou, 2007). This is an aspect that researchers must take into consideration when presenting their results.

When observing classroom instruction, different approaches can be used. Knoblauch and Schnettler (2012) argue that video interaction analysis is in essence an interpretative method, and thus a hermeneutic activity. Bakeman and Quera (2011), on the other hand, favour systematic observations, where coding schemes are used as measuring instruments. As Blikstad-Balas (2017) points out, it is also possible to combine different methods. For example, once large-scale coding has been used across a large amount of video data, it is possible to make use of the coding to identify particularly interesting data segments that can be analysed more in detail. This is an approach that I use in my own research.

In the LISA-project, the Protocol for Language Arts Teaching (PLATO) was used to code different aspects of teaching quality on a four-graded scale (Grossman, 2019). I have not used PLATO-data in my own research, but watching and coding some of the Swedish and Finnish[2] language arts lessons was highly valuable since this gave me an overview of what went on in a large number of classroom. PLATO-scores from lessons coded by other researchers have also been valuable since they indicate what goes on in the classroom, for example if a lesson includes literature instruction or not. However, relying on PLATO-codes has not been enough, and it has been necessary to watch all videos to check what they include. While I have been working with different project, I have gradually gained a deeper understanding of my data. When working with *Function and Use of Literary Texts in Nordic Schools*, I adopted a broad perspective and paid attention to *if* teachers used literature in the instruction, *what* text genres were used, and *how* students worked with literary texts. What I discovered in that study served as a foundation for *Literature as an Aspect of Literature Instruction* and *Talking about Literature*, where I dig more into details.

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[2] Swedish speaking classrooms

When working with video data, it is possible to watch the same interaction repeatedly, which is certainly a clear advantage. However, what actually determines the value of video observations is the meaning that the observer constructs when watching and analysing the material (Miller & Zhou, 2007). Viewers with experiences from different contexts might notice different aspects when watching the videos (Miller & Zhou, 2007). This implies that I, who come from a Swedish context, might pay attention to other things that someone from another Nordic country does. This can certainly be a problem, but it is also possible to turn it into something positive. Researchers need to become aware of their own implicit assumptions and preconceptions, and when investigating a context that is slightly different from the one you are used to, it is possible to notice also minor differences, and to learn that what you take for granted is not equally common everywhere. This is an important insight that I have gained when working with video-data from the Nordic countries.

The Survey

In order to find out what teachers say about their own literature instruction, I intend to send out a questionnaire to approximately 200 lower secondary teachers in each of the Nordic countries. In the questionnaire, the respondents will primarily get alternatives to choose from. For example, I intend to ask how, how often and for what purposes teachers let their students work with literature in the classroom. The questionnaire will mainly be based on closed-ended questions, and before the final version of the questionnaire is constructed, it will be important to investigate what kinds of questions will be suitable to ask. Information about this might be collected through another questionnaire based on open-ended questions. I will also take the results from my first article (*Function and Use of Literary Texts in Nordic Schools*) into consideration. Although the teachers answering the questionnaire will not be the same as those who participated in the video-study, this approach will make it possible to compare what teachers say about their own instruction to what can be observed in video-recorded naturally occurring instruction.

The first questionnaire will be sent out to a limited number of teachers. When I have analysed it, I will be able to construct he "real" questionnaire, and once it has been pilot-tested and, if needed, adjusted, I will distribute it to the final sample of teachers. It will probably be a challenge to reach the number of teachers that I intend to include in this study, and most likely, it will be impossible reach a random sample of teacher. Furthermore, I expect teachers who value using literary texts in their instruction to be more willing to answer

the questionnaire. This is why I intend to include a question that asks the respondents about their attitudes towards literature and the use of literature in language arts instruction. Thus, the results from the survey will not tell whether Nordic language arts teachers in general are positive or negative towards using literature in their instruction, but it will say something about those who have answered the questionnaire.

Ethical Considerations

The Video Studies

Since video recordings constitute processing personal data, they should only be used when the same result cannot be achieved through the use of other data collection methods (Vetenskapsrådet, 2017). However, because of the design of the LISA-project (and of three of my own studies), it is important that the interaction between teachers and students can be observed repeatedly and in detail. Therefore this method serves its purpose.

When collecting and archiving qualitative data (e.g. video-data), ethical considerations are of paramount importance, especially when qualitative data will be used (and re-used) by several researchers. This is a sensitive issue which has led to a polarized debate between those who claim that qualitative data cannot be re-used and those who, based on pragmatical and cumulative arguments, advocate it (Dalland, 2011). It is critical to address ethical and data preparation issues at the start of new research projects, and to make sure that participants agree to taking part in a study where data might be re-used in different research projects (Corti et al., 2000).

In the LISA-study, teachers, students and students' parents were informed about the study before the data collection started. Among other things, they were told that the study follows the demands for good research ethics, and that all information about participants and schools will be stored in a way that prevents unauthorised people from taking part of it. All schools and participants will be anonymous, for instance in publications. Written and informed consent was provided from all participants. Because of the students' young age (13-14 years old) their parents had to sign the consent form.

Since the study wanted to catch naturally occurring instruction, teachers' normal planning has presumably not been overly affected, which can be considered positive since it limits the negative impact which the study might have on participants. All students did not want to take part in the research

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project, but since there were "blind zones" in the classrooms all students could participate in teaching.

The fact that there are cameras and an observer in the classroom most likely affects teachers and students. Mondada (2006) explains that the camera helps co-creating the activities that it captures. Since the cameras in the LISA-project are stationary, they seem to affect the participants very little. There are examples of teachers who behave in ways which indicate that they are a bit nervous, at least in the beginning of a lesson, and infrequently a student waves at the camera, or comments on it. However, generally students and teachers behave in a way which suggests that the cameras do not disturb them very much.

The Questionnaire

Data about teachers' literature instruction will also be collected through a questionnaire, which will be sent out to language arts teachers in Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Finland and Iceland. Some overall information about the project will be presented in the questionnaire, and those answering it will have to give written and informed consent before they start answering the questions in the questionnaire. The questions will not be of sensitive nature, and no information about names and schools will be collected. Since I will personally be responsible for collecting data outside Sweden, it will be important for me to find out how this can be done in a correct way.

Summaries of the Articles

Function and Use of Literary Texts in Nordic Schools

Nissen, Tengberg, Svanbjörnsdóttir, Gabrielsen, Blikstad-Balas, and Klette (2021)

The aim of this study was to compare the enacted literature instruction in lower secondary language arts classrooms in Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden. The study is based on video-data from 102 classrooms, where four consecutive lessons had been recorded. It reveals how lessons are organized in Nordic lower secondary literature instruction, to what extent different literary genres are present in the instruction, and for what subject-specific functions and purposes literary texts are read and worked upon.

We performed quantitative analyses and found that literature seems to play an important part in all four countries. In 69% of all classrooms, students read and/or worked with literature at least once during the video-recorded

lessons. Approximately 35% of the lesson time (based on the number of 15-minute segments) was used for literature instruction. Our analyses also revealed differences in how lessons were organized. Whole lessons were normally used for literature instruction in Iceland and Sweden, but in Finland it was more common to work with different subject matters during the same lessons. In Norway, teachers sometimes gave lectures about genre features, literary devices or authors before a literary text was introduced to the students.

In all four countries, students primarily met narrative texts (e.g., novels for teenagers, short stories and fairy tales). Sometimes, students read silently in books of their own choice. In all countries, there was at least one classroom in which all students read the same novel, but this was more common in Sweden than in the other countries. Teachers (especially in Finland and Sweden) rarely used lyric poetry in their instruction.

When investigating for what functions and purposes literature was used in the instruction, we identified five different categories. Very often, literary texts were used to *help students develop their reading and reading comprehension*. We also found that teachers frequently tried to *provide students with reading experiences*. More seldom, literature was *used as a source of knowledge* (e.g., to teach students grammar or genre features), to *convey a cultural heritage*, or to *provide content and inspiration for students' written and oral production*.

In sum, we draw the conclusion that in these four countries, literature seems to maintain a central position in lower secondary language arts instruction, which reflects what is expressed in the current Nordic syllabi (Gourvennec et al., 2020; Ministry of Education Science and Culture, 2014). The fact that teachers frequently make student oriented choices, and primarily select literary texts that presumably appeal to their students, raises questions about what kinds of texts are suitable to include in the instruction. We point out that the openness of the syllabi may in effect lead to a narrowed scope of variation. Finally, we note that paying attention to genre features and literary devices might help students become more conscious of the literary work as an aesthetic object. However, in Finnish and Swedish classrooms, teachers seldom paid attention to issues related to genre features, and in Iceland and Norway, where genre features and literary devices were actively taught, students were not encouraged to use this knowledge when discussing and interpreting literary texts.

Cognitive Activation as an Aspect of Literature Instruction

Nissen (in review)

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In this article, the concept of *cognitive activation* is used to discuss and assess the teaching quality in Swedish and Norwegian lower secondary literature instruction. It investigates 1) the *objective cognitive activation potential* of tasks that students are assigned, and 2) how and to what extent teachers increase or decrease these tasks' *realized cognitive activation* potential.

The study is based on video data from the Swedish and Norwegian LISA-studies, and focuses on 54 lower secondary classrooms in which literary texts are actively used. The *task* (i.e., teachers' oral or written instructions telling students what to work with, including reading) was chosen as the unit of analysis. First, I used a four-level coding manual based on Bloom's taxonomy (Anderson et al., 2001) to score 279 tasks' *objective cognitive activation potential* (oCAP). In this way, I was able to assess whether a task in itself invited to cognitive activation on a low, medium low, medium high, or high level. Since tasks are not always carried out in the intended way, I also investigated whether teachers increased or decreased these tasks' cognitive activation level (or if it remained unchanged). In this way, I was able to assess tasks' *realized cognitive activation potential* (rCAP).

My analysis shows that, in both countries, students often took part of literary texts through reading or (more often) listening (34% of all tasks). On such occasions, oCAP was coded on a low level. Teachers frequently let their students reflect on texts that they had read, or asked them to represent the literary text in a new format (58% of all tasks). Most commonly, that kind of tasks were coded on a medium high level, and e.g., implied that students were asked to summarize the plot, or to describe characters or settings. There were few examples of tasks where students were expected to interpret, compare or analyse (coded on a high level), and of tasks where oCAP was coded on a medium low level.

When rCAP was assessed, I found that it mostly remained unchanged. However, when students took part of literary texts, rCAP was quite often increased (35% of all reading activities), e.g., when teachers interacted with their students and asked them questions when literary texts were read aloud. When teachers provided answers, simplified tasks or gave unclear instructions, rCAP was considered to decrease. This most often happened to tasks on a high oCAP level.

A key finding in this study was that, in both countries, tasks' oCAP primarily remained on a low, medium low, or medium high level. Tasks on different oCAP levels can be beneficial, and serve different purposes, but this study indicates that Swedish and Norwegian teachers very often use tasks on a

medium high level (students are expected to represent, paraphrase or summarise the content of a literary text). This implies that these students seldom get the opportunity to interpret, compare and analysis literary texts, even though such skills are emphasized in language arts curricula and national tests in both countries (Gourvennec et al., 2020; Tengberg, 2017).

Another important finding was the fact that students more often listened to literary texts than read them on their own. Concerns have been raised over young people's declining reading comprehension, and the fact that teachers often interact with their students when literary texts are read aloud can be seen as a way for teachers to help students develop their understanding of the text. However, when students seldom are required to read independently, they do not get the opportunity to practise decoding letters and words, which is one of many processes underlying text comprehension (Kintsch & Rawson, 2008). This is worrisome since school-related reading in all subjects seem to decrease (Vinterek et al., 2020).

Talking about Literature

To be written

Nordic Literature Instruction According to Teachers

To be written

Analysis

Discussion

Conclusions

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FUNCTION AND USE OF LITERARY TEXTS IN NORDIC SCHOOLS

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Abstract

In this comparative study, naturally occurring literature instruction in Nordic lower secondary school is investigated in order to find out how lessons are organized, to what extent different genres are read and worked upon, and for what subject-specific functions and purposes literary texts are used. Implications for text selection by teachers are discussed. The study relies on four consecutive video-recorded language arts lessons from 102 classrooms in Finland, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden. The function and use of literary texts were investigated by means of video-analysis and statistical comparisons. The analysis clearly indicates that literature plays an important part in Nordic language arts education. In all four countries, narrative fiction texts were favored above other genres. When the aim was to give students joint reading experiences, short stories and excerpts from novels were normally used. Reading literature for the sake of developing comprehension appears to be a dominant function of using literary texts in Nordic lower secondary arts classrooms. The present study also suggests that it is important for Nordic teachers to provide their students with positive reading experiences.

Keywords: literature instruction; reading literature; Nordic comparisons; secondary education; video analysisIntroduction

By tradition, literature instruction is a natural and incontestable part of language arts education all over the world, and literature is widely considered vital to young people's personal and intellectual development (Alsup, 2015; Showalter, 2003). A range of arguments and empirical evidence support the use of literature in school: it contributes to language development, encourages good reading habits, provides readers with experiences and knowledge, impedes undemocratic values, and facilitates the understanding of others through simulation of social experience and interaction (Lamarque & Olsen, 1994; Mar & Oatley, 2008). There is, however, a risk that such ideas are perceived as established truths, and that the desired effects of reading literature are seen as instinctive and automatic (Persson, 2012). Although Schrijvers et al. (2019) found that literature instruction, under certain conditions, can develop adolescents' capacity for understanding other people, they could also see that it was not only important to choose adequate texts to read, but it was also necessary to design the right kind of tasks to help students prepare the reading experience, and to process it in writing and/or discussions after the reading.

Several studies provide valuable insight into teaching practices that are beneficial for students when it comes to reading literature. For example, we know that certain types of discussion can help shape students' comprehension of texts (Wilkinson et al., 2015), and that reading strategies can impact students' understanding of the texts they read (Block & Parris, 2008; National Reading Panel [NRP], 2000; The Swedish Institute for Educational Research, 2019). A key implication from previous research is that the ways texts are used will have consequences for the kind of literary competence students develop. This makes it even more important to systematically investigate how and for what purposes literary texts are made a part of instruction by teachers across contexts.

Research within the educational field has previously been dominated by small-scale studies based on various methodological and theoretical approaches (Klette et al., 2017). These studies have contributed with nuanced and useful information about classroom practices, but it has been difficult to compare results between various studies, and to measure practices over time (Klette et al., 2017). As for research on literature instruction, many studies rely on interventions and on trying out ideas launched by researchers (see e.g., Elf et al., 2019; Tengberg et al., 2015). Thus, while we may know about key features of high-quality literature instruction, we know less about how language arts teachers include literature in their everyday teaching across schools.

In the present study, we compare literature instruction in lower secondary language arts classrooms in Finland, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden, and we examine how and to what extent literary texts are used. We draw on video data from a research project called Linking Instruction and Student Achievement (LISA). The project was first designed and launched in Norway (Klette et al., 2017), but has expanded into a large-scale international video study (LISA Nordic) investigating the teaching quality across Nordic classrooms. In this study, we analyzed video-recorded language arts lessons from a total of 102 classrooms in lower secondary schools. Four

consecutive lessons were recorded in each classroom. During the data collection, teachers were asked to follow their ordinary lesson plan, which might (or might not) include the use of literary texts. This implies that the instruction they present vary in many different ways. Thereby, it provides a valuable insight into what goes on in language arts classrooms across the Nordic countries.

Traditionally these countries are known for high literacy rates and populations that tend to read a significant amount of fiction (Hansen, 2018; Mjøset, 2018; Sulkunen & Malin, 2018). They also share social, linguistic, and educational commonalities, and Nordic classrooms show a number of shared features when it comes to teaching and learning practices (Klette, 2018). Therefore, many similarities can be expected when literature instruction in these countries is compared, and it is reasonable to assume that differences between individual teachers and classrooms are sometimes larger within than between countries. Yet, it is beneficial to adopt a comparative perspective since national traditions and syllabi might emphasize different characteristics and different ideals of literary reading. Comparison of teachers' instruction across borders and traditions also makes it possible to notice qualities and patterns that may be difficult to discern when national practices are investigated.

The aim of this study is to compare the enacted literature instruction in lower secondary language arts classrooms in Finland, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden, and to examine how and to what extent literary texts are used in the instruction. More specifically, the following research questions guide the study:

1) How are lessons organized in Nordic lower secondary literature instruction?
2) To what extent are different literary genres read and worked upon in the daily instruction?
3) For what subject-specific functions and purposes are literary texts read and worked upon?

1. LITERATURE REVIEW

Since the early 2000s, Nordic teenagers' reading habits have decreased (see e.g., Egelund, 2012; SOU, 2018; Jensen et al., 2019). However, in the period 2003-2015, the proportion of Icelandic girls who read on a daily basis increased from 13% to 18% (Þórarinsdóttir et al., 2017). Generally, girls report greater enjoyment of reading than boys (OECD, 2019), but in Iceland this difference is less pronounced than in most other countries (Þórarinsdóttir et al., 2017). PISA 2018 shows that Finnish students still perform very well when it comes to reading comprehension, but they are becoming less interested in reading (Finnish Government, 2019). Approximately 50% of the Norwegian students in the PISA-study report that they do not read in leisure hours (Jensen et al., 2019), and a similar tendency can be observed in Sweden, where fifteen-year-olds seem to be somewhat more negative towards reading than their peers in other Nordic countries (The Swedish National Agency for Education, 2019).

1.1   Literature in Nordic curricula

In Danish, Finnish, Norwegian, and Swedish language arts curricula, literary texts are included in an extended notion of text, but they are also ascribed a prominent position (Gourvennec et al., 2020). Hence, it can be argued that they are given significance as something different from other texts. Gourvennec et al. (2020) draw the conclusion that although literature may have lost some of its former status in language arts, literary texts are still given significance and prominence in comparison to other text types in Nordic curricula. In the Icelandic curriculum (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2014), which was not included in the analysis, "reading and literature" is presented as one of the main objectives of teaching Icelandic; and Icelandic cultural heritage, which is predominantly related to literary texts, is especially mentioned.

Different purposes of literature education are given weight in different countries, but in the curricula Gourvennec et al. (2020) analyzed, they could identify a number of similarities. For example, all four curricula highlight positive reading experiences as a justification for reading literature. Höglund (2019) found that in the new Finnish curriculum from 2014, the expectation that literature instruction can increase students' interest in reading is even more pronounced than it was in previous curricula. She points out that in this way a reading crisis is expressed in the curriculum. Another important similarity between the four curricula is that they all state that reading literature can contribute to personal growth and identity formation (Gourvennec et al., 2020). However, the curricula do not make it exactly clear how work on literary texts is supposed to bring about this development, which, according to Gourvennec et al. (2020), will leave teachers in a challenging and interpretative position. They infer that this can lead to a situation where teachers turn towards concrete and measurable aspects of the curriculum. Lundström et al. (2011) note that it is easier to measure what students learn *about* literature than it is to measure what they learn *from* literature. Therefore, teachers might prioritize formal aspects in their literature instruction.

1.2   Nordic literature instruction

Different traditions influence how literature is read and interpreted in a school context (Johansson, 2015; Torell, 2002). In Scandinavian (i.e., Danish, Norwegian, and Swedish) classroom research, experience-based, reader-oriented approaches have been common, whereas there have been few studies focusing on students' analytical work with literary texts (Rødnes, 2014). When it comes to classroom teaching and learning practices on a general level, comparative classroom analyses have shown that there are many similarities across the Nordic countries (Klette, 2018). On the other hand, factors such as curricula, textbooks, and traditions influence teachers' instruction (Lundström et al., 2011; Mossberg Schüllerqvist, 2008; Rørbech &

Skyggebjerg, 2020), which entails that students in different countries are taught different subject content in different ways.

There are few studies investigating literature instruction across the Nordic countries, but we know that literary texts are explicitly and specifically mentioned in all Nordic curricula (Gourvennec et al., 2020; Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2014). There is, however, a difference in how these documents address questions about the origin of literary texts. Whereas the Norwegian and Swedish curricula stress the importance of reading literature from different parts of the world, there is an implicit norm emphasizing national literature in the Danish curriculum, where there is also a literary canon of Danish/Scandinavian authorship (Gourvennec et al., 2020). Yet, teachers are principally free to decide what literary texts to use in their classrooms, and also to what extent literary texts will be used (Gourvennec et al., 2020). Finland has two national languages, and even though goals and content in language arts are the same for both Finnish speaking and Swedish speaking students, there are minor disparities concerning linguistic and cultural characteristics (Finnish National Board of Education, 2014, p. 289). In the Icelandic curriculum, much emphasis is put on the importance of reading skills on a general level, but the curriculum also states that students should read Icelandic as well as foreign literature (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2014)

Scandinavian language arts teachers' bases for the legitimation of their subject seem to be very much the same (Ulfgard, 2012). In interviews, Danish, Norwegian, and Swedish teachers working in upper secondary school pointed out reading literature and developing linguistic skills as two key areas of the subject. Communication, reflection, and personality development were other issues that they considered important (Ulfgard, 2012). In assignments connected to literary texts in Norwegian textbooks, students are often invited to interpret the text, and to express their personal experiences (Bakken & Andersson-Bakken, 2016). According to Penne (2012), Scandinavian teachers strive to create positive experiences through reading, and students' individual interpretations of literary texts are by and large respected. In a more recent study, Tengberg (2019) found that Swedish teachers do not encourage their students to expand their ideas when working with literary texts. Rather, students' initial interpretations are immediately accepted.

In comparison to French students, research has indicated that Swedish students are socialized into a tradition that promotes personal readings and individual opinions of literary texts rather than analytic close reading (Johansson, 2015). Although Swedish teachers refer to language development and reading comprehension when talking about teaching objectives in literature studies, they still emphasize the reading experience (including for example aesthetic awareness, identification with fictional characters, and getting to know other people's experiences) as an important approach to literature (Wintersparv, 2021). Swedish students associate their own experiences and sometimes identify themselves with the characters they read about, but seldom pay attention to literary devices (Nissen, 2020). While Kabel (2012) found that Danish students merely engage in fictional characters on a superficial level, her

study also indicates that Danish students can use analytical concepts, and to quote the literary text in order to justify their interpretation. When observing Norwegian literature instruction, Gabrielsen et al. (2019) noticed that teachers and students frequently focused on general genre features and literary devices when talking about literary texts. In conclusion, these findings suggest that across the resembling contexts that the Nordic educational systems represent, there may be some critical differences in how literature is used and taught.

1.3 Choosing literary texts—national characteristics

Previous research has shown that Scandinavian teachers frequently meet students who are not used to reading long advanced texts, and who are not interested in literature (Penne, 2012). Therefore, these teachers often choose literary texts that their students actually like, and that present situations where young people can recognize themselves and their own lives (Penne, 2012). However, there also seems to be various national differences that guide teachers' choices of literature.

In Finland, literature has traditionally played an important part in language arts. In 1998, when the subject changed names from "mother tongue" to "mother tongue and literature", its prominent role was even more emphasized (Höglund, 2019). Many Finnish teachers point out that it is very important for them to make their students interested in reading. Therefore, they try to find books that appeal to their students (Rejman, 2013). Tainio and Grünthal (2016) claim that the intimate interrelation between language and literature studies in Finnish classrooms is an important reason why Finnish students' literacy skills are so well developed. In Finland, language arts teachers often base their instructions on literary texts (Luukka et al., 2008). The cultural heritage and gender issues affect teachers' choices of texts, as well as the supply and stock of books at individual schools (Rejman, 2013). Tainio and Grünthal (2016) note that, when it comes to contemporary prose and poetry, Finnish teachers constantly endeavor to introduce fresh examples. Since they want their students to expand their reading repertoire, they aim to introduce a versatility of genres and titles (Rejman, 2013).

The Icelandic national curriculum (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2014, p. 102) prescribes that students should be able to "read, interpret, evaluate and discuss a variety of Icelandic and foreign literature". Neither titles, nor literary genres, are mentioned in the curriculum. Nevertheless, previous research has shown that the same literary texts recur in many schools (Kristjánsdóttir et al., 2018). Kristjánsdóttir et al. (2018) state that for the main part of the 20th century, tradition dominated the teaching of literature. Today, contemporary literature plays a very important role, but the Icelandic sagas are still popular among the majority of students (Kristjánsdóttir et al., 2018). According to Lea (2015), students in upper secondary school primarily read imaginative literature that mainly consists of poetry and narrative prose. There is an emphasis on Icelandic classics such as the saga literature and the *Edda* poetry; and Icelandic language arts teachers in upper secondary

school attach great importance to the cultural heritage, i.e., the Icelandic language and literature, when they describe their subject (Lea, 2015).

Norwegian language arts teachers in lower secondary school legitimate the position of literature in different ways, but typically share an understanding that literature is important (Kjelen, 2013). When they choose literary texts to use in their instruction, they aim to find texts that will appeal to their students. Factors such as traditions, collegial agreements, and access to books are also important when they decide which texts to work with (Kjelen, 2013). The same texts are often used for a long time, and a relatively small number of well-known titles frequently recur (Kjelen, 2013). Skaug and Blikstad-Balas (2019) found that although many language arts teachers in upper secondary school express a positive attitude towards reading complete works, it is more common for them to use excerpts from textbooks in their instructions. Therefore, although Norwegian teachers are in practice free to choose any texts they want, Skaug and Blikstad-Balas (2019) could nevertheless identify an unofficial canon based on titles published in students' textbooks. Also in lower secondary school, the majority of the literary texts Norwegian students read can be found in their textbooks (Gabrielsen & Blikstad-Balas, 2020). Gabrielsen and Blikstad-Balas (2020) remark that surprisingly few teachers actively choose literary texts to use in their classrooms. Usually, they rely on choices that have been made by publishers, or let their students choose their own books to read.

Furthermore, the Swedish curriculum allows teachers a great deal of freedom when it comes to choosing literary texts (The Swedish National Agency for Education, 2018). Many teachers prefer to describe their instructions as "textbook-free", but textbooks are used also by Swedish language arts teachers (Ullström, 2009). When they copy pages from textbooks, or use class sets of different anthologies, their students meet literary texts and tasks from various instructional materials (Ullström, 2009). It is common that Swedish teachers choose literary texts based on the assumption that it is valuable for students to be able to identify themselves with the characters they read about (Lindhé, 2015). Accordingly, factors such as identification and recognition guide teachers' choices, whereas complicated language, or an unaccustomed context, can deter them from using a certain text (Tengberg, 2011). Recently, there has been an increased focus on literature discussions as a way to enhance students' reading comprehension (Martinsson, 2018). When literature is discussed, a joint reading experience is necessary. As a consequence, Swedish teachers sometimes use literary texts, for example short novels, that students can read, discuss and understand within one single lesson. This might explain why so-called easy readers have become increasingly popular in Sweden (Nordenstam & Olin-Scheller, 2018).

3. METHODS

3.1 Participants and data collection procedures

The study draws on video data collected across 102 classrooms in the Nordic countries (Finland: 8, Iceland: 10, Norway: 46, and Sweden: 38) in the first year of lower secondary school (students are 13–14 years old), which means grades 7 (Finland[1] and Sweden) and 8 (Iceland and Norway). The classrooms were sampled to provide insight into typical and nationally representative teaching practices, and schools varied in size, location, and in composition of socioeconomic background of parents. The teachers who participated in the study varied in age and years of teaching experience. Across all countries, most of the teachers were female, in line with the Nordic gender imbalance among language arts teachers (see Table 1). As can be seen in Table 1, teachers also possessed different qualifications in language arts.

Table 1 Teacher demographic data

| Country | Gender | | Age* | | | | | Qualification in Subject (ECTS)* | | | | |
	Female	Male	20-29	30-39	40-49	50-59	60+	No ed.	0-30	31-60	61-90	90+
Finland	7	7	0	0	5	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	7
Iceland	9	7	2	0	3	3	3	0	0	1	4	1	3
Norway	26	22	4	5	10	6	2	1	2	2	17	1	1
Sweden	28	22	6	0	5	18	4	1	0	0	5	13	10
All Countries	70	58	12	5	23	28	10	2	2	3	26	15	21

Information about two of the Norwegian teachers is missing.

Four consecutive language arts lessons were video recorded in each classroom. Since the intention behind the research project was to examine naturally occurring instruction, teachers were asked to follow their ordinary lesson plans, meaning that many recorded lessons would contain content other than literature, for example writing or formal language training. For the present study, the entire recorded material is initially maintained for overview. However, for subsequent analyses of literature

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[1] *Because no one in the research group speaks Finnish, all video data from Finland were collected in Swedish-speaking classrooms.*

instruction and text use, only those lessons are selected in which a literary text is present and in focus for instructional activities. Lessons would normally last 45 minutes but could be both shorter and longer. When coding data, we systematically divided each lesson into 15-minute segments to be able to distinguish between lessons where texts were used for the entire lesson (for example 45 minutes, equaling three segments), and lessons where literary texts were used only for a smaller portion of the lesson. Thus, the unit of comparison and analysis in this work is at the segment level, but we have seen all the four lessons from each classroom. In total, 1,171 segments (equaling approximately 290 hours) were included in this study (72 from Finland, 100 from Iceland, 535 from Norway, and 464 from Sweden).

Table 2 Numbers of classrooms and segments included in the study

Country	Number of classrooms	Number of 15-minute segments	Number of segments per classroom (Mean)
Finland	8	72	9
Iceland	10	100	10
Norway	46	535	11,6
Sweden	38	464	12,2
All countries	102	1171	11,5

Due to practical circumstances, the datasets enabled from Norway and Sweden were substantially larger than those from Finland and Iceland (see Table 2.) This raises some critical questions about comparability of the data in the study. However, since large-scale video-uptake of naturally occurring instruction is rare in the field of educational research, and since the act of making a representative reduction of the two larger datasets would have entailed several problematic sampling issues, we have chosen to include as much of the collected data as possible, and to remain cautious when drawing conclusions from the comparative analyses. In practice, this means that our study provides a broader picture of Norwegian and Swedish literature instruction than of Finnish and Icelandic literature instruction. However, although the data from Finland and Iceland was comparatively limited, we found it highly valuable since it helped us discern patterns that we otherwise would not have been able to notice. In addition, the data also indicates and suggests what characterizes Finnish and Icelandic literature instruction. To the best of our knowledge, it is the first time that literature instruction from these countries is compared systematically based on authentic classroom observations.

Video recordings have proven valuable in classroom analysis by enabling systematic investigation of complex educational settings and deconstruction of detailed qualities in teaching (Blikstad-Balas, 2017; Heath et al., 2010; Klette, 2009). The same

video design was used across all classrooms and included two fixed cameras simultaneously recording the same lesson: one capturing the students and one focusing on the teacher. The camera setup followed methodological recommendations to use small fixed cameras to minimize interference of the cameras in the classroom setting (vom Lehn & Heath, 2007). One microphone was placed on the teacher and another one was fixed to capture the class, which provides reasonably good audio of both whole-class discourse and of teachers conferencing with individual students. In order to provide a richer representation of the classroom activities, copies of assignments and photos of whiteboard instructions, and student products were collected.

All teachers, parents, and students have consented to participating in the study, following the ethical consent guidelines in their home country.

1.4 Analyses

All the video data from the 102 classrooms were systematically screened to identify lessons containing literary texts, such as poems, novels, short stories, comics, and plays. This is a typical way of "winnowing the data" in a large data corpus (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Guest et al., 2012). In this initial analysis, the aim was to exclude all lessons in which students were not reading and/or working with a literary text. The authors systematically viewed each recorded lesson and carefully reviewed the original logs from on-site data collection, where research assistants had written down what kind of activities (including reading literature) was happening in the lesson.

When we analyzed the lessons, we systematically registered titles, authors, and genres of literary texts that were used. Then all texts were categorized into broader genres. We also jot down what kind of instruction took place during a lesson, for instance "the teacher reads aloud from X", "sustained silent reading", "instruction about reading comprehension strategies", "whole class/ group discussions about the text", "students write book reviews" and so on. These inductive notes helped us investigate for what purposes literature was used in different classrooms. Based on our notes, we discerned a number of relevant "functions". In this process, it was important to find a limited number of categories that captured important aspects, and that were clearly separated from each other. The identified functions were not mutually exclusive as the same literary text can be used for multiple purposes, and as the results will show, several lessons incorporated more than one way of using literature. The deductive codes (functions) that we developed are:

- *Provide students with positive reading experiences*, used when teachers frame texts as a way to arouse students' desire to read, and as something that will be a positive reading experience;
- *Help students develop their reading and reading comprehension*, used when teachers emphasize that reading and working with a specific text will foster competent readers;

- *Convey a cultural heritage*, used for instance when literary texts are justified as important to read because they belong to some kind of (national, often implicit) canon;
- *Use literature as a source of knowledge*, applied broadly to instances when teachers indicate that literary texts possess content knowledge, which can be transmitted to readers. Sometimes literary texts are used to teach students about other cultures, other peoples' lives and/or ethical issues. In such cases, they provide knowledge about the external world. When students are expected to focus on literary concepts and genre features, literature is used as a source of knowledge about literature itself. In these cases, the code is also applied; and
- *Provide content and inspiration for students' written and oral production*, used when students are required to present their understanding of a literary text in written text, or in a prepared oral presentation.

2.   RESULTS

The aim of this study was to compare the enacted literature instruction in lower secondary language arts classrooms in Finland, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden, and to examine how and to what extent literary texts are used in the instruction. A quantitative analysis of the material revealed that literature played an important part in all four countries. In 69% of all classrooms in all four countries, students read and/or worked with literary texts at least once during the video-recorded lessons. However, as can be seen in Table 3, the prevalence of literature instruction varied between countries, from 57% (in Norway) to 90% (in Iceland). There was also a difference in how much lesson time was actually spent on literature instruction. In Finland, Norway and Sweden students read and/or worked with literary texts during approximately one third of the lesson time, while in Iceland, 53% of the lesson time was used for literature instruction.

Table 3 Classrooms with literature instruction and lesson time spent on literature instruction

	Total number of classrooms	Classrooms with Literature Instruction	Lesson time spent on literature instruction*	
		Number	%	%
Finland	8	7	88	36
Iceland	10	9	90	54
Norway	46	26	57	31
Sweden	38	28	74	36
All Countries	102	70	69	35

* Based on the number of segments where literary texts were read and/or discussed.

One of the aspects that we wanted to investigate was how lessons where literature instruction took place were organized. We found that in Iceland and Sweden, whole lessons were normally used for literature instruction. This pattern was present in Finland and Norway as well, but more commonly, teachers in these countries would use at least part of a lesson to teach something else. Norwegian teachers sometimes gave lectures (15 minutes or more) about themes related to the literary text at hand (e.g., genre features, literary devices, or the author) before it was presented to the students. In Finland, students normally worked with varied subject matter within the same lesson. A teacher would, for example, give her students instructions about how to prepare an oral presentation before reading aloud from a teenage novel during the last ten minutes of the lesson. Students in another classroom would practice writing for 15 minutes before turning their attention to a novel excerpt, which was then read and discussed during the remainder of the lesson.

Comments from teachers and students indicate that reading and/or working with literature was a recurring element (normally every week) in some of the observed classrooms. The four national samples all include classrooms where sustained silent reading was a regular activity. In Sweden, teachers would also sometimes organize discussions about chapters from a novel that the students had read at home, thereby facilitating their reading process and providing opportunities for expressing their ideas about the literary text. Moreover, we observed Swedish classrooms in which working with literature constituted a theme for a series of lessons, often focusing on a single text (a novel or a short story), as well as classrooms in which the reading of many short stories or excerpts from novels were used for the purpose of teaching and practicing reading comprehension strategies.

We also investigated to what extent different literary genres were read and worked upon in the daily instruction. When doing so, we discovered that when working with literature, these Nordic students solely met traditional genres. For the most part, they read and worked with narrative texts, such as novels for teenagers, short stories, and fairy tales (see Table 4). This was true for 91% of all observed classrooms that worked with literature, whereas only 22% of them worked with lyric poetry in one way or another. Although students in one of the Finnish classrooms were asked to write their own poems based on a short story that they had listened to, none of the Finnish classrooms (N = 7) actually read texts from this genre. Approximately one-fourth of teachers (18 out of 70) in the four countries used short stories or excerpts from novels in their instruction. Sometimes, especially in Iceland and Norway, teachers used texts that were published in students' textbooks.

It was rather common that teachers let their students read novels of their own free choice (See table 4). In all four countries, there were also examples of classrooms (a least one) where all students read, or listened to, the same novel. However, this praxis was much more common in Sweden than in the other three countries. In 13 of the Swedish classrooms (N=28), all students worked with the same novel, generally a contemporary novel written for teenagers. We found a noteworthy variation

when it comes to titles, and there were only two examples (in four of the Swedish classrooms) where the same two novels were used.

Table 4 Numbers (and percentages) of classrooms where different literary genres were used

Country and total number of classrooms	Novels for teenagers (the same book for everyone)	Novels Free choice of reading	Short stories/excerpts from novels	Fairy tales, myths and fables	Lyrics	Poetry	Comics
Finland 7 classrooms	1 (14%)	2 (29%)	3 (43%)	3 (43%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Iceland 9 classrooms	1 (11%)	2 (22%)	3 (33%)	3 (33%)	0 (0%)	3 (33%)	0 (0%)
Norway 26 classrooms	1 (4%)	10 (38%)	13 (50%)	1 (4%)	4 (15%)	6 (23%)	1 (4%)
Sweden 28 classrooms	13 (46%)	4 (14%)	5 (18%)	6 (21%)	2 (7%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)

Finally, we examined for what subject-specific functions or purposes literary texts were read and worked upon in the observed classrooms. The analysis was based on five different categories described in the methods section above (see Figure 1). The analysis showed that some functions were more prevalent than others. "Help students develop their reading and reading comprehension" (observed in 45 out of 70 classrooms) and "Provide students with positive reading experiences" (observed in 36 out of 70 classrooms) were much more common than the other three functions. In Icelandic classrooms, there was a comparatively strong focus on "Convey a cultural heritage". "Use literature as a source of knowledge" and "Provide content and inspiration for students' written or oral production" were more frequent in Norway than in the other three countries. How the different functions were implemented in the instruction will be described below.

Figure 1 Functions of literary texts
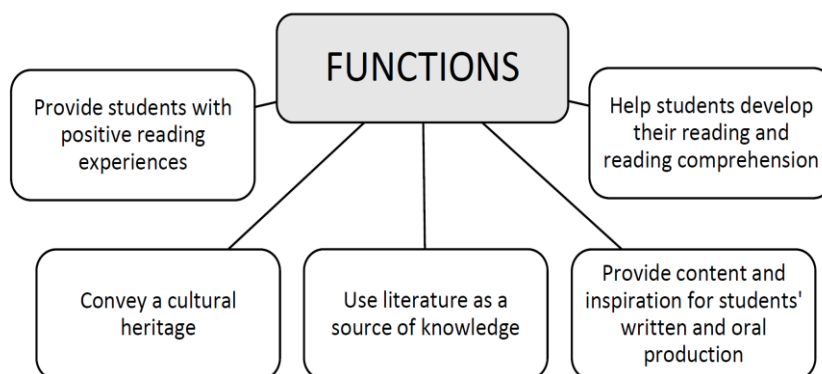
"Help students develop their reading and reading comprehension" was the most common function. In 64 % (N=45) of the classrooms with literature instruction, students were presented with different kinds of tasks that presumably support such a development. Typically, students took part in discussions about the text, or answered questions about it. There were also many classrooms where the students briefly summarized what they had read, orally, in writing or in picture. Reading comprehension strategies were taught and/or actively used in some of the Norwegian and Swedish classrooms, but neither in Finland nor in Iceland.

It was also very common that literature was used to provide students with positive reading experiences. In all four countries, there were classrooms where students read silently in books of their own choice. We also observed that when teachers chose novels that they wanted their students to read, they very often made student-oriented choices. For example, they frequently introduced literary texts where students could identify themselves with the main characters. This was especially common in Sweden.

Literary texts are sometimes used as a source of knowledge (for instance about the external world or about literature itself). For instance, it can be used in cross-disciplinary instruction in connection to social subjects (Ingemansson, 2007). We saw surprisingly few examples of this in the classrooms we observed, but in one of the Norwegian classrooms where the students worked with the same theme in language arts and history, the teacher used a poem by Henrik Ibsen (*Terje Vigen*) to illustrate what life in Norway could be like during the Napoleon wars. Eight of the Norwegian teachers in our sample used literary texts to teach their students genre characteristics and/or literary devices. This praxis was less common in the other three countries, but we saw a few examples in Iceland and Sweden as well. In Finland and Iceland, there were a few teachers who used literary texts in their grammar instruction, and

in Norway, literature was used when students practiced reading Norwegian Nynorsk (i.e., one of the two official Norwegian written languages).

"Convey a cultural heritage" was another function that could be observed in several Nordic classrooms. When analyzing our samples, we found that Icelandic teachers frequently gave emphasis to the national cultural heritage. Four of the Icelandic classrooms read and worked with texts related to the Icelandic saga tradition (*Laxdæla* and *Hrafnkellssaga Freysgoði*), or with fairy tales taking place in an Icelandic setting. Fairy tales from a broader Western tradition were presented by Finnish and Swedish teachers. There were also four Swedish classrooms working with myths and stories from ancient Greece. In some classrooms, texts written by famous national authors were used (for example, Henrik Ibsen, Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson, and Alf Prøysen in Norway; and Astrid Lindgren in Sweden).

When students have processed their understanding of a literary text, on their own or in dialogue with others, they are sometimes asked to represent their understanding of the text in a new format. In such cases, the literary text provides content and inspiration for students' written and oral production. This was rather common in Norway, where literature had this function in ten of the classrooms where literature instruction took place. In the other three countries, we could see relatively few examples of this praxis, but in some classrooms students presented literary texts that they had read in book reviews, or in oral presentations. There were also examples where students transformed a literary text into another genre.

3.   DISCUSSION

This study sets out to compare the enacted literature instruction in lower secondary language arts classrooms in Finland, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden, and to examine how and to what extent literary texts were used in the instruction. We were interested in finding out what position literary texts have in Nordic lower secondary language arts education, and to investigate the characteristics of Nordic literature instruction. While the sample collected for the study is quite large compared to samples used in previous research of cross-country comparative design (cf. Elf & Kaspersen, 2012; van der Ven & Doecke, 2011), it should be underscored that it still captures only a glimpse of what goes on in Nordic language arts classrooms. A total amount of 290 hours of language arts instruction in Finland, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden have been recorded and analyzed. However, the study provides only a mere indication of the potentials, limits, prospects, and challenges that the prevalent instruction contains. Minding those limitations in terms of representativity, it is still feasible to obtain from the analysis an array of reasonable and relevant hypotheses about patterns, trajectories, differences and, similarities in Nordic lower secondary literature instruction.

To sum up the results, the study showed that a considerable amount of lesson time (35%) was spent on literature instruction, but the way in which it was organized varied between the four countries included in the study. Spending the entire lesson

working on a literary text was common in Iceland and Sweden, while in Finland and Norway, literary reading often constituted a part of the lesson, which would also contain other subject content. The use of literary genres proved to be similar between countries, favoring the narrative text (novels or short stories) above poetry, comics, and drama. Finally, the data displayed a range of various functions and purposes of using literature that cut across countries. In all Nordic countries, literary texts were frequently used to foster students into competent and interested readers, but there were also some country-specific patterns (e.g., that to convey a cultural heritage was more prevalent in Iceland, that joint novel reading and focus on students' development of comprehension was a trait more typical for Sweden, and that using literary reading as a way to teach students genre features was more common in Norwegian language arts classrooms).

By reference to these results, literature seems to maintain a central position in Nordic lower secondary language arts instruction, thus reflecting the intentions expressed in the current syllabi (Gourvennec et al., 2020; Ministry of Education Science and Culture, 2014), where, for example, aspects such as positive reading experiences and personal growth are referred to (Gourvennec et al, 2020; Höglund, 2019). As previously mentioned, our data indicates that Finnish, Icelandic, Norwegian, and Swedish teachers habitually attempt to find literary texts that appeal to their students. As the frequency of teenagers' leisure time reading decreases, and teachers' planning of instruction is only to a limited degree guided by textbooks, it may be natural that contemporary narrative literature written for teenagers is favored in order to engage students in reading by avoiding the aesthetic and emotional friction often afforded by using for instance poetry or drama in the classroom (Peskin, 2010; Weaven & Clark, 2013). Thus, the openness of the syllabi in terms of text selection (where different literary genres are mentioned but not prescribed as assigned reading) may contribute to a narrowed scope of variation in the literature chosen.

However, when textbooks do guide teachers' choices of literature, as we found to be more prevalent in Iceland and Norway than in Finland and Sweden, unofficial canons are formed (Aamotsbakken, 2011; Skaug & Blikstad-Balas, 2019; Vinje, 2005) that may undermine intentions of the syllabus (see Fougt et al., 2020). On average, teachers in the latter two countries had earned higher subject-specific qualifications, which is likely to support confidence in their own professional judgment and autonomy, and thus equips teachers to make their own selections without the influence of textbook canons. At the same time, text selection practices are known to be part of local school-based traditions, economic limitations as well as of national traditions and trajectories of the ongoing dialogue between language arts teachers online (Applebee, 1992; van Bommel et al., 2020). The country-specific tendencies observed in the present study may thus be governed by both individual and social factors of text selection. Although the present dataset, as noted above, cannot be thought of as representative for the national contexts, a reasonable pursuit of future research should certainly be to gauge more thoroughly the motives behind, and the trajectories of, literary selection in various countries.

Since the meaning of a literary text is not a definable entity, but rather a dynamic experience (Iser, 1978), readers preferably make use of their own disposition and personal experiences when literary texts are interpreted. This can facilitate and develop their understanding of the text (Iser, 1978; Langer, 2011). Previous research has shown that Nordic teachers choose literature that appeals to their students (Kjelen, 2013; Rejman, 2013) and where these young readers can recognize themselves and aspects from their own lives (Lindhé, 2015, Tengberg, 2011). This is in line with our findings, which suggests that Nordic teachers often make student-oriented choices when they decide which literary texts should be part of a joint reading experience. However, the idea that teachers' instruction ought to draw on students' experiences and preferences can be questioned (Ziehe, 2004). According to Ziehe (2004), it can be important for teachers to orchestrate situations where conceptions that seem self-evident, or even plain, are challenged. Sønneland (2019) found that literary texts that offer resistance attract lower-secondary students. When encouraged to talk about literary texts in which the narrative form was complicated, students paid attention to what disturbed them, and got involved in literary discussions about topics and ideas that they found relevant and important. As Sønneland (2019) points out, this indicates that difficulty does not stand in opposition to attraction. Her findings, as well as Ziehe's (2004) ideas, raise questions about what kinds of texts are suitable to use in literature instruction.

In Norway, but also in Iceland, literary texts were used in situations where genre features and literary devices were taught. This can certainly be a way for students to develop their metalanguage, and to gain a vocabulary that potentially makes it possible for them to discuss literature at a deeper level. However, what we observed in these classrooms were merely situations where literature was used to exemplify genre features and literary devices. Students were not encouraged to use their knowledge about these issues when discussing and interpreting literary texts. In the Swedish and Finnish classrooms, teachers paid little, if any, attention to issues related to genre features. This is in line with what previous research has shown. Torell (2002) found that Finnish and Swedish teacher candidates were fostered in a school system where there was a lack of training when it comes to understanding and analyzing literary texts as aesthetic works of art. More recent studies (Johansson, 2015; Nissen, 2020) have shown that Swedish students seldom include analytical aspects such as narrative perspective, narrative structure, or figures of speech when they share their thoughts about literary texts. Training students to employ that sort of perspectives might be a way of promoting readings more conscious of the work as composition, and thus a more analytic look on the work as an aesthetic object.

In conclusion, the present study represents a preliminary bird's-eye view of naturally occurring literature instruction across four of the Nordic countries. Although it contributes with valuable information about lesson organization, text selection, and functions and purposes of literary reading, there is a range of aspects that need to be further investigated. For instance, the study suggests that using literature to foster competent readers and develop comprehension is a prevalent function of

literature instruction in Nordic classrooms, but the study does not allow for any conclusions about the way in which teachers' planning relate the literary aspects of literature reading to the more general goal of reading comprehension. In the same way, we do observe many differences and similarities between instruction in the different countries, but it is not in the scope of the present study to establish the extent to which such differences (or similarities) relate to educational cultures and curricula, or if individual differences between teachers and classrooms also play a significant role in the patterns we observed. For these purposes, subsequent studies are necessary. Therefore, we hope that comparative designs of research into literature instruction are at a beginning, for there is much to learn, and new patterns to be detected, by contrasting instructional traditions across cultural borders.

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Cognitive Activation as an Aspect of Literature Instruction

Abstract

In this study, the concept *cognitive activation* is used to assess and discuss teaching quality in Swedish and Norwegian lower secondary literature instruction. Drawing on video-data from 54 classrooms, it investigates how cognitively activating are tasks (including reading activities), and how and to what extent do teachers increase, or decrease, the cognitive activation potential of these tasks. A four-graded coding manual was used to score the objective cognitive activation potential of 279 tasks. Tasks are not always carried out in the intended way. Therefore, the realized cognitive activation potential of all tasks was also estimated. One third of all task implied that students took part of literary texts. When they were expected to work more actively with texts, tasks were mostly coded on a medium-high level. Students were seldom required to analyse, compare and interpret literary texts. Mostly, the realized objective potential remained unchanged.

Keywords: literature instruction, cognitive activation, video-observations, teaching quality, lower secondary school

Introduction

Literary texts are often used in situations where students practice reading and reading comprehension (Nissen et al., 2021), but although it is important that young people develop such abilities, there are also other reasons why reading and working with literature are valuable. Literary texts may help readers explore important questions about human beings and human life (Nussbaum, 1990), and Schrijvers et al. (2019) have found that literature instruction, under certain circumstances, can help students develop their understanding of other people, and of themselves. This idea is reflected in Nordic curricula, which state that reading literature can contribute to personal growth and identity formation (Gourvennec et al., 2020). Yet, there is a risk that positive effects of reading literature are taken for granted (Persson, 2012). Therefore, it is important to investigate what goes on in literature classrooms, and to learn what constitutes high-quality literature instruction.

When evaluating teaching quality, general as well as subject specific aspects can be taken into consideration. In literature instruction, elements such as the use of authentic texts in instruction and classroom discourse (Grossman, 2019) are important since they capture whether and to what extent students get the opportunity to discuss and develop their understanding of literary texts, and

if they are expected to cite and analyse specific features of the text. Literary texts differ from other kinds of texts since they are open for interpretation. During the reading process, the text and its reader co-create meaning (Iser, 1978). Therefore, reading and understanding literary texts demand a certain kind of competence. To some extent, it differs from reading factual texts, and literary literacy, i.e. the ability to understand literary texts, involves cognitive demands that partly differ from factual reading literacy (Frederking et al., 2012).

Teaching quality can be perceived in different ways, and it is, for one thing, important to consider whether students, or teachers, are the ones doing the majority of the intellectual work This is why it is relevant to assess and measure the academic rigor of activities, assignments and teacher questions that students are engaged with in class. Some activities and assignments require students to use high-level analytical thinking, to synthesize and evaluate information, and to argue for their opinions, whereas others are almost entirely rote or recall (Grossman, 2019). Previously, the concept *cognitive activation* has primarily been linked to students' learning outcomes in mathematics classrooms (see e.g. Kunter & Voss, 2013; Lipowski et al., 2009), but also in literature instruction, it is important that teachers introduce activities that are intellectually challenging for their students.

This study relies on video-data from Swedish and Norwegian lower secondary classrooms and focuses on cognitive activation in literature instruction. It investigates how language arts teachers make use of literary texts in their instruction, and assesses teaching quality based on the cognitive activation potential of tasks that teachers present to their students. The study addresses the following research questions:

- How cognitively activating are tasks that students meet in Swedish and Norwegian lower secondary literature instruction?

- How and to what extent do teachers increase, or decrease, the cognitive activation potential of these tasks?

In a Nordic context, large-scale video studies are rare, and the reason for using sub-samples from Sweden and Norway is two-fold. First, data from a large sample makes conclusions more reliable. Second, cultural similarities across the Nordic countries, combined with national characteristics (for instance when it comes to policy development) (Reimer et al., 2018), make it interesting to

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analyse video-data from two neighbouring countries, and to pay attention to similarities and differences across the sub-samples.

Cognitive Activation

Cognitive activation is a condition for students' engagement in knowledge construction, for example when challenging tasks are implemented at an appropriate pace. It can also indicate that students are engaged in higher-order thinking and required to provide reasons for their answers (Praetorius et al., 2018). Since different learners have shifting experiences, some situations that require higher-order thinking by some students are not as challenging for others (Lewis & Smith, 1993). This is one reason why it can be complicated to determine the level of cognitive activation. Another problem, which becomes evident when different studies are compared, is the fact that there seem to be a lack of consensus when it comes to how cognitive activation ought to be operationalized (Praetorius et al., 2014).

The revised version of Bloom's taxonomy (Anderson et al., 2001) presents a variety of cognitive processes that are required to achieve different kinds of knowledge. There is a continuum underlying the cognitive process dimension, and some processes (e.g. compare and explain) are assumed to be more complex than others (e.g. recognize and recall). In the present study, the assumption that cognitive processes on different levels complete each other is an important cornerstone. This is in line with ideas expressed by Newmann et al. (1998): Before students are able to solve complex problems, they need a basic foundation of knowledge and skills. It also important that they get the opportunity to engage in interpretation, analysis and evaluation of information, and that they are encouraged to draw conclusions.

Winkler (2020) remarks that "cognitive activation lies under the surface of teaching" (p. 9), which means that it cannot be directly observed. Rather, it is necessary to estimate it through tasks worked on in class, or on the quality of content-related classroom discourse. When assessing cognitive activation in literature classes, Winkler (2020) distinguishes between *assigned task* and *task realisation*, and Weingartner (2022) talks about "objective cognitive activation potential" and "realized cognitive activation potential". During the working process, the assigned task may not be realized in the way it was intended, and the characteristics of an assigned task can differ considerably from the characteristics of the realised task (Winkler, 2020). Therefore, it is not only valuable to evaluate what kind of mental processes can be stimulated by a particular task, but also to investigate how the task is implemented.

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High-level questions and comments from teachers and students can maintain or increase the rigor of a task, whereas questions and comments focusing on rote or procedural aspects will downgrade an otherwise challenging task (Grossman, 2019). Structuredness and complexity are two important factors that influence the level of difficulty of a task, and students' own questions and reactions can be seen as indicators for cognitive processes. In addition to this, the amount and quality of teacher uptake should be taken into consideration when the depth of processing is estimated (Winkler, 2020).

(Implicit) Cognitive Activation in Swedish and Norwegian Literature Instruction

Previously, Swedish and Norwegian researchers investigating literature instruction have paid little, if any, attention to different levels of cognitive activation. Nevertheless, there are a number of studies dealing with aspects related to cognitive activation, and national curricula as well as national tests indicate what cognitive levels Swedish respectively Norwegian teachers are expected to aim at in their instruction. The Norwegian curriculum for language arts in lower secondary school states that students should be able to compare and interpret different kinds of literary texts, and to reflect upon aspects such as purpose, content, genre conventions and literary devices. The Swedish curriculum expresses similar ideas, but is less detailed and only says that students should read and analyse literature. Even though the Swedish curriculum indicates that one purpose of reading literature is to learn how to analyse, understand and interpret literary texts, this is not reflected in the knowledge requirements (Gourvennec et al., 2020). In both Sweden and Norway, national tests are used in order to measure and assess students' reading comprehension according to curriculum goals. These tests include tasks that demand different levels of cognitive effort, but in both countries interpretive, reflective and analytical processes rather than basic skills are emphasized (Tengberg, 2017).

When investigating tasks related literary texts in Swedish upper secondary textbooks, Ullström (2007) found that two different kinds of questions were common: control-questions and open questions. Control-questions infer that students have read the text, and that they understand what the text says. There is, however, a risk that students answer such questions without actually reading the text (Ullström, 2009) and Ullström (2007) argues that the use of control-question is problematic since it might make students feel inferior as readers.

There are also other kinds of questions that turn directly to students and ask for answers relying on their personal opinions. Often these questions are neither about the text, nor about the reader's understanding of it, but about something completely different. According to Ullström, tasks in textbooks seldom unite the text, the reader and the reading. More commonly, questions and tasks are loosely connected to the literary text, and encourage readers to associate to aspects beyond the text (Ullström, 2007). In textbooks intended for language arts in Norwegian upper secondary school, tasks related to literary texts are to a large extent "open", which means that they can be answered or solved in different ways (Bakken & Andersson-Bakken, 2016). Most of these tasks can be categorized as "evaluative", which implies that students are asked to seek answers within themselves. In some cases, tasks are "closed". Then students are either asked to reproduce an answer that can be found directly in the literary text, or to find an answer through reasoning.

Teachers' questions about literary texts indicate what is important to pay attention to, and shape students' reception of the text at hand. When analysing literary discussions in lower secondary classrooms, Tengberg (2011) identified six different forms of reading that both enable and restrict readers' discernment of the text. He found that plot oriented forms of reading were more common than other forms of reading. Teachers often asked their students what the story was about, or encouraged them to discuss characters. This pattern has been observed also in other studies. For example, Nissen (2020) found that in literary discussions it seemed to be important for ninth-grade students to summarize what the story was about, and when writing about a short story that they had listened to, Swedish upper secondary students more often than French students wrote content-related texts (Johansson, 2015).

Methods

Literature Instruction: A Definition

This study is based on video data from the Swedish and Norwegian XXX-studies and focuses on 54 Swedish (*N*=28) and Norwegian (*N*=26) lower secondary classrooms where literature instruction takes place. Literature instruction is defined in a broad way and is presumed to consist of four different steps (see Figure 1). Primarily, it includes situations where a literary text is either read or worked upon (c.f. Rejman, 2013). More seldom, it implies that students are asked to prepare their reading (for example when they predict what is going to happen in the story) or to present what they have read (for example

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when they give oral presentations). However, on all such occasions the text itself must be in focus. This means that situations where literature is discussed on a more general level are not included in the concept.
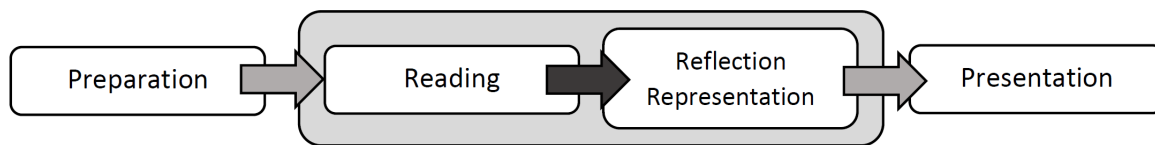

Figure 2 Literature instruction: A model

Participants and Data Collection Procedures

All students participating in the study were 13-14 years old (grade 7 in Sweden and grade 8 in Norway). The classrooms included in the study are part of a larger sample consisting of 38 Swedish and 46 Norwegian classrooms that were sampled in order to match the national averages and distributions of variables such as urban and rural areas, different socioeconomic background, and varying achievement levels. For more details see Tengberg et al. (2021) respectively Klette et al. (2017).

Video recordings make it possible for researchers to thoroughly document and observe different kinds of research items (Derry et al., 2010). The video design used in this study included two cameras that recorded the same lesson simultaneously. One camera filmed the teacher whereas the other one filmed the class. There were also two different microphones: one for the teacher and one for the class. In each classroom, four consecutive language arts lessons were recorded, and photos of whiteboard instructions, PowerPoints, students' assignments etc. were collected. Lessons varied in length, but most commonly lasted for 40-45 minutes.

All teachers were encouraged to keep their normal planning, which implies that the study captures naturally occurring instruction. Due to the design, only a small sample of each teacher's instruction is represented. Since a large number of teachers took part in the study teaching methods as well as lesson content vary. There are also differences between classrooms when it comes to how much time is spent on literature instruction, varying from one to four lessons. Informed consent was given by teachers, students, and students' guardians. All students did not want to take part in the research project, but since there were "blind zones" in the classrooms, the teachers could nevertheless teach all students.

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Objective and Realized Cognitive Activation Potential on Task Level

The study focuses on cognitive activation and estimates the cognitive activation potential of tasks that students meet in literature instruction. Tasks are defined as oral or written instructions telling students what to do or work with, including for example reading and listening to literary texts, summarizing plots, describing characters, and discussing questions. In an initial coding process, all situations where students read or worked with literary texts were identified. There were in total 279 tasks where literary texts were actively used (130 in Swedish classrooms, and 149 in Norwegian classrooms). As can be seen in Figure 2, these tasks vary considerably in length. Most commonly, less than 10 minutes were spent on one task. Students rarely worked with the same task for more than 20 minutes. There were more examples of short tasks in the Norwegian classrooms, whereas Swedish students more frequently worked with the same task for an extended period. The total amount of time spent on literature instruction was 54,5 hours (30 hours in Sweden and 24,5 hours in Norway). Lessons also included teachers' lectures, as well as other kinds of subject content than literature. Such instances were not included in the study.
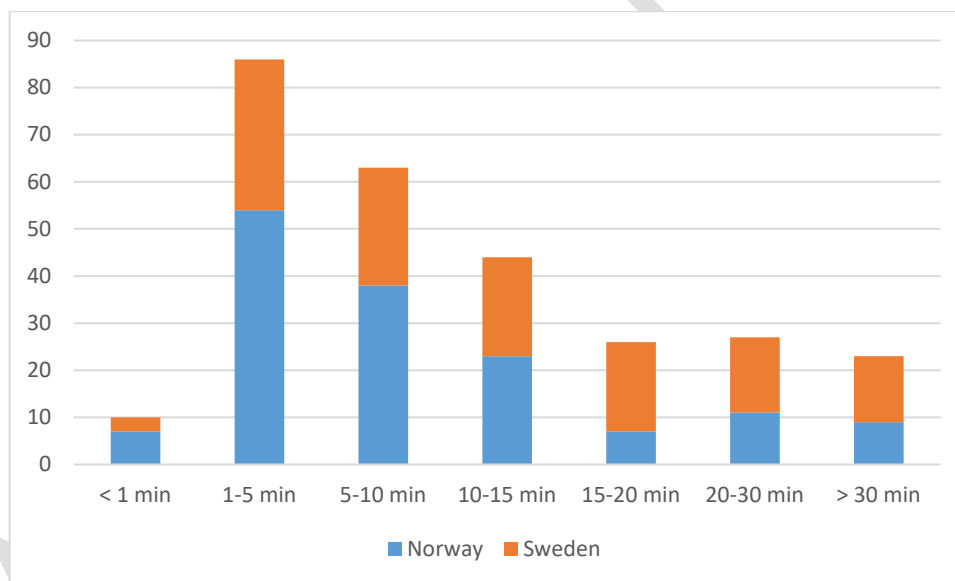
Figure 3 Time spent on task

In order to be able to estimate the objective cognitive activation potential (oCAP) (Weingartner, 2022) of tasks, a coding manual with four different levels was developed. The ways teachers presented tasks to their students, orally or in written instructions, were noted. Subsequently, these descriptions of tasks formed the basis of coding. The coding manual (see Figure 3) was inspired by Bloom's taxonomy (Anderson et al., 2001) and the element *Intellectual*

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Challenge in the Protocol for Language Arts Teaching Observation (Grossman, 2019).

During the coding process, time spent on tasks was not taken into consideration. Therefore, "long" as well as "short" tasks might get the same score. The coding of oCAP exclusively relied on aspects clearly expressed in instruction and visible to the coder. High-level content does not automatically involve high-level activities, and unless students share their thoughts and reflections, it is not possible to find out what goes on in their heads, for example when they read or listen to a text. Therefore, although some of the literary texts might be more difficult for the students to understand than others, all instances where texts were read or listened to were coded on the same level. Generally, tasks were introduced in ways that made it possible to understand what was expected from the students, but there were also situations where teachers' instructions were vague, for instance when students were told to continue working with whatever they did during a previous lesson. With one exception it was, however, always possible to decide what was the objective cognitive activation potential of tasks.

Objective Cognitive Activation Potential (oCAP)			
1.	2.	3.	4.
On the *low* level, cognitive activation is related to activities rather than to tasks. Students take part of literary texts (through reading or listening), or listen to their teacher, or to peers (for example when other students present their understanding of a literary text).	On the *medium low* level, tasks demand students to recognize, recall, retrieve, present, illustrate or share.	On the *medium high* level, tasks imply that students are required to clarify, exemplify, classify, predict, relate, describe, *summarize*, *explain* and/or *represent*. There might also be additional examples of processes that demand low cognitive activation (see level 2).	On the *high* level, tasks demand students to compare, interpret, reflect, *analyse*, *evaluate* and/or *create*. Tasks on this level are generally complex, and they may *additionally* include cognitive processes used on lower levels.

Figure 4 Coding manual: Cognitive Activation Potential (oCAP)

Since tasks and teachers' intentions are not always carried out in the way they are intended, this study also investigates to what extent teachers increase, or decrease, the cognitive activation potential of tasks. The realized cognitive activation potential (rCAP) was coded on three different levels (decreased, unchanged or increased) and was applied to tasks on all levels of oCAP. This coding was done based on the assumption that some factors increase the level, whereas others decrease it. For example, situations where many students are active and where teachers ask clarifying questions and encourage students to develop their ideas can be expected to increase rCAP. On the other hand, situations where teachers' provide answers, simplify tasks or give unclear instructions can be expected to decrease it. Also, in classrooms where students

are unable to stay focused, for example due to disorder, rCAP most likely decrease. When rCAP was coded, only aspects that could be observed during a particular lesson were considered. Thus, neither instructions and information from previous lessons, nor written instructions, were taken into consideration unless they were visible and/or discussed in class.

The Coding Process and Reliability

The author, who developed the coding manual, coded all tasks and activities. In order to find out if the manual could be used also by other coders, and to check for inter-rater reliability, 15% of all tasks were double coded. Cohen's Kappa was calculated. It was 0.70 for oCAP and 0.74 for rCAP, which means that the inter-rater reliability can be described as substantial (Landis & Koch, 1977).

Results

The Objective Cognitive Activation Potential of Tasks

This study investigates how Swedish and Norwegian language arts teachers make use of literary texts in their instruction, and assesses the cognitive activation potential of tasks that they present to their students. An analysis of all tasks showed that the objective cognitive activation potential (oCAP) was incident to the step of literature instruction (*preparation*, *reading*, *reflection and representation*, or *presentation*, see Figure 1) where the literary text was used. *Reading*, and *reflection and representation* were found to be the most common steps of literature instruction. All instances where student took part of literary texts were coded on level 1. Tasks where students were expected to work actively with texts (*reflection and representation*) were coded on higher levels (2 – 4), although most commonly on level 3. As for *preparation* and *presentation*, there were few examples of situations where these steps were visible in the instruction. As can be seen in Table 1, there were some differences between the two countries when it came to the number of tasks coded on different levels of oCAP. However, when an independent t-test was conducted in order to compare the means for oCAP in the Swedish and Norwegian samples respectively, it was found that there was no significant difference between the two groups (Sweden: $M = 2.29$, $SD = 1.08$; Norway: $M = 2.15$, $SD = 1.18$); $t(277) = -1.01$, $p = .313$).

Table 1 Numbers of tasks in relation to steps of literature instruction and level of oCAP

Level of oCAP		1	2	3	4
Preparation	Norway	0	2	0	0
	Sweden	0	3	3	0
Reading	Norway	54	0	0	0
	Sweden	42	0	0	0
Reflection and representation	Norway	0	18	53	12
	Sweden	0	18	40	19
Presentation	Norway	7	2	0	0
	Sweden	1	4	0	0
Total		**104**	**47**	**96**	**31**

Preparation

Pre-reading activities are expected to facilitate students' understanding of literary texts, and predicting the content is a valuable reading comprehension strategy (Roe, 2014). As can be seen in Table 1, there were very few examples of tasks related to *preparation*, especially in the Norwegian sample. There were also some situations where students were asked to make predictions based on the title, or the book cover, but they were not included in the concept *literature instruction*. When students were encouraged to refer to the text in order to justify their predictions, oCAP was coded on level 3. This was, however, rare. More often, students were merely expected to guess what was going to happen in the story they were reading. Then oCAP was coded on level 2.

Reading

Swedish as well as Norwegian students frequently took part of literary texts through reading or listening (34% of all tasks) (oCAP 1). In both countries, students more often listened to literary texts than read silently on their own (see Table 2). Most commonly, teachers read aloud while students listened, usually with the text in front of them. Sometimes, students took turns to read aloud in whole class instruction or in groups. There was also a limited number of occasions where literary texts were presented in alternative ways, for example when teachers used lyrics in their instruction and let their students watch music videos. When students read silently on their own, students in eight Norwegian classrooms were given time to read books that they had chosen themselves, but in the Swedish sample there were only two examples of this.

Table 2 How students take part of literary texts

	Number of tasks	Tasks (percentage)	Time spent on tasks hh:mm	Time (percentage)
Students listening to literary texts	**70**	**73%**	**11:18**	**64%**
Teacher reading aloud	*43*	*45%*	*6:32*	*37%*
Students reading aloud	*17*	*18%*	*2:52*	*16%*
Videos, audiobooks, singing etc.	*10*	*10%*	*1:54*	*11%*
Students reading on their own	**26**	**27%**	**6:17**	**36%**
Reading	96	100%	17:35	100%

Reflection and Representation

In the observed literature instruction, it was very common that teachers let their students reflect upon texts that had previously been read, or that they asked them to represent literary texts in new formats (58% of all tasks). Such tasks were coded on level 2 – 4. As can be seen in Table 1, they were most commonly coded on a medium high level (oCAP 3). This very often implied that students were asked to summarize the plot (orally, or in writing), but it was also rather common that they were asked to explain why certain things happened in the text, or to describe characters or settings. Sometimes tasks related to this step of literature instruction were coded on level 2, but this was less common. However, this was done for example when a literary text was used to expand students' vocabulary, and when students drew pictures to illustrate what had happened in the text. Mostly, literary discussions were coded on level 3, but situations when teachers checked students' understanding of literary texts and asked controlling questions (rather than encouraging them to exchange ideas) were coded on level 2. There was also a limited amount of tasks (11 % of all tasks) that were scored on level 4. Tasks on this level most often implied some kind of interpretation or analysis, but sometimes students were expected to make comparisons between texts, or in relation to their own experiences. In one Swedish and one Norwegian classroom, students transferred a literary text from one genre to another, which implied that they created something new. These tasks were also coded on level 4.

Presentation

Once students had, for example, discussed a literary text or represented it in a new format, they were sometimes, but not very often, asked to present the results of their efforts to their classmates. In the Norwegian sample, students from two different classrooms gave oral book presentations. The preparation of such activities can demand cognitive activation on rather high levels, but during

the actual presentation, the majority of students were merely expected to listen to individuals talking about their reading experiences. Therefore, oral book presentations were coded on level 1. Instances when everyone was expected to share what they had discussed or written (in groups or whole-class instruction) were coded on level 2.

The Realized Cognitive Activation Potential of Tasks

In the present study, the concept realized cognitive activation potential (rCAP) (Weingartner, 2022) was used in order to examine the implementation of tasks in class. An analysis of all tasks showed that most commonly (for 63% of the tasks), rCAP remained unchanged. This was true for all levels of oCAP, except for level 4. When rCAP was investigated more in detail, it was found that the distribution of rCAP varied depending on the level of oCAP (see Table 3). The analysis indicated that rCAP was more often changed (increased or decreased) in Swedish than in Norwegian classrooms.

Table 3 Distribution of rCAP in relation to oCAP

		Decreased	Unchanged	Increased
oCAP 1	Sweden	2	20	21
		5%	47%	49%
	Norway	1	45	15
		2%	74%	25%
oCAP 2	Sweden	5	15	5
		20%	60%	20%
	Norway	2	19	1
		9%	86%	5%
oCAP 3	Sweden	6	29	8
		14%	67%	19%
	Norway	9	36	8
		17%	68%	15%
oCAP 4	Sweden	10	4	5
		53%	21%	26%
	Norway	2	6	4
		17%	50%	33%
Total	Sweden	23	68	39
		18%	52%	30%

| Norway | 14 | 107 | 28 |
| | 9% | 72% | 19% |

For oCAP level 1 (when students read or listen to literary texts), rCAP was very seldom decreased. When this happened, it was due to some kind of disorder in the classroom. More often (35% of all reading activities), rCAP was increased when students took part of literary texts, and Figure 4 shows that oCAP 1 was the level where teachers most often increased rCAP. In both countries, but especially in Sweden, teachers frequently interacted with their students when literary texts were read aloud. Then they asked questions that presumably facilitated the understanding of the text, encouraged students to use reading comprehension strategies, or inspired them to relate to their own feelings or experiences. There were also other ways in which teachers increased rCAP in relation to reading. They would, for example, tell students what to look for in the text, or encourage them to predict what was going to happen in the story they were reading. Swedish teachers more often than Norwegian teachers increased the level of rCAP when literary texts were read. Literary texts used in Norwegian classrooms were generally shorter than the ones presented in Swedish classrooms, and it was also rather common that Norwegian students read silently in books that they had chosen themselves. At least to some extent, this might explain why rCAP mostly remained unchanged in situations when Norwegian students took part of literary texts.
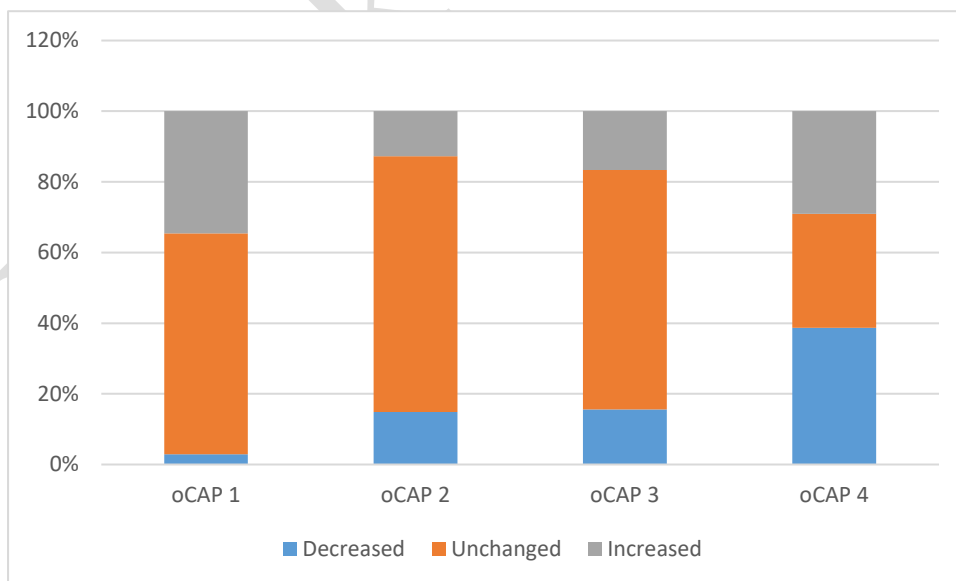

Figure 5 rCAP (in %) in relation to level of oCAP

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It was more common that rCAP was changed (and, above all, increased) when oCAP was coded on level 1 than on higher levels. However, for oCAP level 2 – 4, rCAP was increasingly changed (decreased or increased) depending on the level of oCAP (see Figure 4), which implies that teachers interacted more with students when they worked with more cognitively demanding tasks. When students worked with tasks related to literature instruction (oCAP on level 2 – 4), this often implied some kind of cooperation in whole class instruction, groups or pairs (66% of tasks on these levels). In these situations, rCAP would primarily remain unchanged, but it was also rather frequently either decreased or increased (see Table 4). Individual seatwork was less common (34% of tasks on these levels). Also when students worked on their own, rCAP mostly remained unchanged. It was, however, more often decreased than in situations where some kind of cooperation was needed, and it was seldom increased.

Table 4 rCAP in relation to instructional format

rCAP	Whole class, group or pair		Individual seatwork	
	Number of tasks	*% of tasks*	Number of tasks	*% of tasks*
Decreased	19	*16%*	15	*24%*
Unchanged	76	*63%*	42	*68%*
Increased	26	*21%*	5	*8%*
	121	*100%*	62	*100%*

The distribution of tasks across the different levels of oCAP was uneven. For example, rather few tasks were coded on oCAP level 2 (17% of all tasks). For most of these tasks rCAP remained unchanged. One probable reason for this was the fact that a large amount of tasks on this level (73%) were short (less than 5 minutes). When rCAP was increased, an initially simple task evolved into something more challenging, primarily thanks to teachers' uptake. There were also a number of tasks where teachers answered questions themselves, or gave confusing or unclear instructions. Then rCAP was decreased.

Figure 4 shows that rCAP was more often changed (increased or decreased) on oCAP level 4 than on level 3. On level 3 (39% of all tasks) differences between the Swedish and Norwegian subsamples were rather small. Only 12% of all tasks were coded on oCAP level 4. An analysis of these tasks showed that rCAP was more often changed in Swedish than in Norwegian classrooms. In Sweden it was, as a matter of fact, more commonly decreased than remained unchanged (see Table 3).

Among the different tasks coded on oCAP level 3 or 4, there were 35 literary discussions lasting more than 5 minutes (Norway N = 22; Sweden N = 13). In these discussions, it was common that teachers asked clarifying questions, encouraged multiple solutions or made sure that many students participated, which increased rCAP. When rCAP was decreased, teachers simplified tasks and questions, or presented answers and solutions themselves. In both countries, there were few examples of situations (7% of all tasks) where students wrote about literary texts for an extended period of time (more than 10 minutes). These tasks were either coded on oCAP level 3 (N = 10) or level 4 (N = 7). Writing activities coded on oCAP level 3 primarily implied that students were to summarize the plot of a text they had read. For these tasks, rCAP mostly remained unchanged, but for all writing assignments coded on oCAP level 4, rCAP was changed. In one Norwegian and three Swedish classrooms (7 tasks) students' writing involved for example analyses and comparisons, but rCAP for these tasks was decreased since instructions were unclear, or since teachers told students what to write. It also seemed difficult for students to stay focused, perhaps since they were expected to work with the same, cognitively demanding, task for quite a long time (30 – 55 minutes). There was, however, one Norwegian teacher who supported her students in their writing in ways that can be expected to increase rCAP.

Discussion

In the present study, the objective cognitive activation potential of 279 tasks related to literature instruction was assessed and estimated. An analysis revealed that these tasks and activities most often implied cognitive activation on low, medium low or medium high levels (oCAP 1 – 3), which is in line with what previous research has shown (see eg. Weingartner, 2022; Tengberg et al., 2021). Students were seldom expected to analyse, compare or interpret texts that they had read (oCAP 4).

In literature instruction, task on different levels of oCAP can help students develop their understanding of literary texts. Since different tasks serve different purposes, it is reasonable that students sometimes work with things that are not very cognitively demanding. As Newmann et al. (1998) point out, it is important that students both practice basic skills and develop abilities that are complex and intellectually challenging. Before students are able to process the meaning of a literary text, it is necessary for them to read or listen to it (oCAP 1). Vocabulary is important for students' understanding of texts (Roe, 2014), especially for second language learners (Nation, 2013), why it might be relevant

for teachers and students to pay attention to difficult words in literary texts (oCAP 2). Asking control questions about a text can be a way for teachers to find out if students remember what has previously happened in a story (oCAP 2). When this takes place before a new part of a story is read, students are presented with (or reminded of) relevant contextual knowledge that will help them understand the text (cf. Branford & Johnson, 1972).

In this study, it was found that students were frequently asked to summarize the plot of a story, or to describe characters and settings (oCAP 3), and previous research suggest that this focus is rather common, at least in a Swedish context (Johansson, 2015; Nissen, 2020; Tengberg, 2011). Asking students what a text is about is presumably a very common question, for instance in literary discussions. Tengberg (2011) observes that teachers often want to know how students have understood a text, either to check if they have read it, or to use their understandings of the text as a starting point for more in-depth discussions. However, in this study, few tasks were coded on oCAP level 4, which implies that teachers and students seldom went beyond representing, paraphrasing or summarizing the content of a literary text. Thus, rather than worrying about the fact that task are sometimes scored on low levels of oCAP, it is more critical to pay attention to the fact that, when students actively work with literary texts, tasks on oCAP level 3 seem to dominate literature instruction in Swedish and Norwegian classrooms. The students who participated in this study were quite young (13 – 14 years old), but if they are to learn how to interpret, compare and analysis literary texts, it is important that they get the opportunity to practice this already at an early age. The fact that these skills are emphasized in language arts curricula and national tests in both countries (Gourvennec et al., 2020; Tengberg, 2017) support the notion that tasks and assignments that require higher order thinking ought to be included in the instruction.

Another aspect that is important to take into consideration is whether teachers actually take advantage of the objective cognitive activation potential of tasks, or if rCAP is decreased. In the present study, rCAP primarily remained unchanged, which correspond to what Winkler (2020) and Weingartner (2022) found in their studies. In some cases, this might be a deliberate decision taken by the teacher. For example, in a test situation it is important that students work independently, and it can certainly be relevant for students to ponder upon the meaning of a text individually, or in discussions with peers, before their share their understandings with the teacher. However, the fact that rCAP remains unchanged might also suggest that the interaction between students and their

teacher is merely about practical issues, which impedes students' opportunities to develop their literary competence.

Previous research has suggested that teachers often adapt their instruction and feedback to a particular group of students and to their abilities and need for support (Ayalon & Even, 2016; Praetorius & Charalambous, 2018) Therefore, the fact that some teachers decrease rCAP might imply that individuals, or groups of students, are not ready for the cognitive challenges that a certain task demands. Nevertheless, it is problematic when teachers facilitate tasks or present answers or solutions rather than providing students with tools and strategies that can help them work independently. In the present study, rCAP was often decreased for tasks on oCAP level 4, for example when students were expected to analyse and interpret literary texts. There were, however, also a number of examples where teachers managed to increase rCAP also for tasks on this level, which infers that it is possible for teachers to support their students in ways that teach them how to solve cognitively challenging tasks. Findings from previous research have shown that explicitly teaching, modelling and providing guided practice in strategies, as well as involving students in collaborations with peers and teachers, are important factors that can help students develop into competent readers and writers (Grossman et al., 2013; Olson & Land, 2007). Therefore, it is important that teachers do not only reflect upon what kind of tasks they present to their students, but also how the intellectual rigor of these tasks can be maintained or increased.

Approximately one third of all tasks in this study implied that a literary text was read. When literary texts were read aloud, teachers often interacted with their students, and thus rCAP was frequently increased. This can be seen as a way for teachers to help students develop their understanding of the text. In both countries, concerns have be raised due to students' declining reading competence, and this issue has been debated in media as well as among policy makers and stakeholders. In Norway, the debate started earlier than in Sweden, (Reimer et al., 2018), but since 2013 the Swedish National Agency for Education has arranged professional development courses focusing on methods related to reading comprehension, for example thinking aloud when reading aloud, using reading comprehension strategies in text talk, and shared reading (The Swedish National Agency for Education, 2021). The fact that so many of the Swedish teachers in this study interacted with their students when they took part of a literary text as a shared reading experiences (see also Nissen et al., 2021), might be a result of an intense discussion about reading comprehension, and of Swedish language arts teachers' participations in professional development

courses focusing on this issue. For practical reasons, it is indeed valuable for teachers to know that all students have taken part of the same text, and that they all finish reading it at the same time. However, although the students in this study mostly had access to the text that they listened to, they did not really get the opportunity to practice and maintain their ability to decode writing. As Kintsch and Rawson (2008) point out, there are a number of different processes underlying text comprehension, and the first of these processes implies that readers decode letters and words. If students are to become competent readers, they need to practice also this skill. Therefore it is worrying that students are not required to read independently in language arts lessons, especially since school related reading in all subjects has decreased (Vinterek et al., 2020).

In this study, the concept cognitive activation has been used to assess and discuss teaching quality, but in literature instruction there are also other ways to capture teaching quality. However, since cognitive activation involve and embrace other elements related to teaching quality (e.g. the use of authentic texts and high-quality discussions about texts) it can be argued that it is especially valuable to focus on cognitive activation in literature instruction. When doing so, it is relevant to consider what motives lie behind teachers' choices, and what factors influence their instruction, but it was not within the scope of the present study to find out why the individual teacher chose to work with literature in a certain way. In addition, only four lessons from each classroom had been video-recorded, why the video data did not always reveal how teaching projects related to literature instruction were introduced and/or finished.

Cognitive activation was measured in two different ways (oCAP and rCAP), but it is a complex concept that includes even more aspects and perspectives. The cognitive challenge that a task involves depends on the individual student and his or her capacity, conditions and qualifications (Lewis & Smith, 1993), and tasks coded on the same level of oCAP might in fact vary in difficulty. For example, when taking part of a literary text, it is harder to follow a complex than a simple plot, and summarizing a text can imply either that the reader synthesizes the plot, or that he or she presents different events in the same order as they occur in the story (Johansson, 2015).

Despite its limitations, this study contributes with valuable information about cognitive activation in Swedish and Norwegian lower secondary literature instruction. The most important finding was that, across the two countries, oCAP of tasks primarily remained on a low, medium low or medium high level. There were also some interesting differences between the two sub-samples:

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Short tasks were more common in Norwegian classrooms, and Swedish teachers more often than Norwegian teachers changed the level of rCAP. Presumably both these aspects have an impact on teaching quality, but this is an issue that will need further investigation. It is, for example, relevant to reflect upon whether students get enough time to finish a task, or if they, on the contrary, get too much time to work with a task.

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Talking about literature

Classroom discussions can potentially help students develop their understanding of literary texts (Wilkinson et al., 2015). However, not all discussions are productive, and the fact that teachers let their students talk about literary texts does not automatically mean that students' understanding of the text at hand is enhanced (Murphy et al., 2009). Simply increasing the amount of student talk is not enough. Rather, it is important to increase the quality of the talk (Wilkinson et al., 2015), and previous research has identified a number of things that characterize high-quality literary discussions. When evaluating nine different discussion approaches, Soter et al. (2008) identified features of classroom discourse that might increase students' learning and understanding. According to them, that kind of discourse is structured and focused, but not dominated by the teacher. Students, not teachers, are the ones expressing ideas and opinions, although open-endeds or authentic questions (i.e., questions without prespecified answers) promt students to develop their thoughts. Soter et al. (2008) also drew the conclusion that it is relevant that the discussion incorporates a high degree of uptake, which implies that participants interact and, for instance, ask for clarification. Teachers' uptake validates students' answers, and follow-up questions from teachers and peers help shaping the course of talk. In this way, the discourse can be jointly determined, and the interaction between teacher and students can help the participants figure out what the text is about.

In some situations, literary discussions primarily seem to be used as a means for students to develop their ability to express ideas and opinions. Then, the text itself is used as a springboard in discussions where participants end up talking about something entirely different. Reznitskaya and Glina (2013) found that in classrooms where a dialogic approach (*Philosophy for children*) was used, students appreciated being encouraged to express their own opinions on questions where there were no predetermined right answers. However, Reznitskaya's and Glina's analysis also reveals that, although these students do discuss important issues, they do not appear to make use of knowledge and ideas expressed in the literary texts.

When working with literary texts in class, experienced-based as well as analytical approaches can be valuable (Rødnes, 2014), but in different context one approach might dominate over the other one. In Swedish classrooms, personal and emotional readings are common (Johansson, 2015), and Lyngfelt and Nissen (2018) found that, when discussing ethical issues in relation to a

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literary text, Swedish lower secondary students did not explore the ambiguity of the text, and their interpretations were primarily based on their own experiences. On the contrary, Norwegian teachers seem to emphasis knowledge about genres and literary devices (Gabrielsen et al., 2019), and recent educational trends in Denmark involve analytical and concept-driven orientations (Kabel, 2021; Rørbech & Skyggebjerg, 2020).

Previous studies launched by researchers (Gourvennec, 2016; Hennig & Eriksen, 2021; Sønneland, 2019; Tengberg, 2011) have provided valuable insight into what students and teachers pay attention to in literary discussion. Still, we know little about how teachers make use of literary discussions in their everyday teaching. This is why this study, which investigates literary discussions taking place in naturally occurring language arts instruction in Norwegian and Swedish lower secondary classrooms, will contribute with important knowledge. The study relies on video data from Linking Instruction and Student Achievement (LISA), a large-scale video study investigating teaching quality across the Nordic countries. Six literary whole-class discussions from six different classrooms will be selected and analysed.

Classrooms in the Nordic countries share a number features related to teaching and learning practices (Klette, 2018), but national curricula regulate and guide teachers' instruction. This is why the Scandinavian perspective is interesting. When it comes to literature instruction, the Scandinavian curricula all emphasise the use of literature as a means to contribute to personal growth and identity formation, but there are also differences. For example, whereas Norwegian and Swedish curricula emphasize the importance of reading literature from various parts of the world, the Danish curriculum includes a literary canon of Danish/Scandinavian authorship (Gourvennec et al., 2020). Previous research, (Krogh & Penne, 2015; Nissen et al., 2021; Sjöstedt, 2013; Ulfgard, 2012) has indicated that there are difference as well as similarities in how Nordic teachers use literary texts in their instruction.

The present study aims to disclose if and how lower secondary teachers and students jointly develop their understanding and interpretation of literary texts when taking part in whole-class discussions. The discussions will be investigated in a qualitative way. Since the sample is small, it will not be possible to draw any general conclusions about literary discussions in Swedish and Norwegian classrooms. Rather, it will be important to pay attention to variation, and to consider how different approaches can have an impact on the quality of whole-class literary discussions. The following research questions guide the study:

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- How do teachers and students co-construct meaning and understanding in whole class discussions about literary texts?
- How do these discussions unfold, and what are they about?
- What kinds of perspectives guide the interpretation and understanding of the literary text?

The Literary Text

Literary texts differ from other kinds of texts in that they are open for interpretation, and understanding the complexity of a literary text can be a challenge. Thus, it can be argued that literary texts demand a certain kind of reading, and a certain kind of literacy. When describing and defining *literary literacy*, Frederking et al. (2012) state that it can be divided into a number of different dimensions. *Semantic literary literacy* refers to the ability to understand the content of a literary text. This ability corresponds to the notion of reading literacy in a general way, but it also integrates genuine characteristics of literary texts such as openness and ambiguity. *Idiolectal literary literacy* captures the ability to analyse formal characteristics of a literary text, and to take their aesthetic functions into consideration. A third dimension, *contextual literary literacy*, concerns the ability to use external information (for example about historical context, literary motives, epochs and genres) when interpreting a text. It is important that readers understand what characterizes fictional texts, and Nordberg (2017) points out that it is indispensable that readers possess the ability to balance empathetic reading with an analytical and distanced viewpoint. When reading literature, a basic ability to read and understand literature is needed, and readers must know what characterizes literary texts. It is also important that readers are able to visualize fictional worlds, and to identify with fictional characters. In addition to this, it is valuable for readers to reflect on their own literary reading, and to consider its effect in terms of personal development (Nordberg, 2017).

In a time when young people's interest in reading seem to decrease (Egelund, 2012; Jensen et al., 2019; SOU, 2018:57), teachers might choose literary texts that all students in a class can easily decode and understand. However, although teachers often make student-orientated choices when deciding which texts to use in their instruction (Nissen et al., 2021), previous research has shown that difficult and challenging texts can capture young people's interest. Even when students lack the tools they need to entirely

understand a complex text (Gourvennec, 2016), they can nevertheless be attracted to aspects and features that disturb them (Sønneland, 2019). Also, although authors may express themselves in complex ways, they usually want to be understood (Rabinowitz & Bancroft, 2014). When discussing how readers explore literary texts, Rabinowitz and Bancroft (2014) use the concept *mind-reading*, which refers to our ability to explain people's behaviour in terms of their thoughts, feelings, believes and desires. They claim that the design of literary texts is partly based on the expectation that readers will engage in mind-reading.

When considering *what* and *how* we read, it is relevant to reflect upon what forms of reading the text opens up for (Agrell, 2003). Rosenblatt (2002) distinguishes between aesthetic and efferent reading, and describes a literary experience as a transactions between the reader and a text created by an author. When literature is read in an efferent way, it is used as some kind of knowledge that can be communicated to the reader (Rosenblatt, 2002). Reading in an aesthetical way demands the reader to turn his or her attention to affective aspects, and to react to feelings, sensations, imaginations and ideas that are created through experiences that a literary text awakes (Rosenblatt, 2002). In text-based discussions, such affective connections between readers and text seem to promote high-level comprehension and critical-analytical responses (Soter et al., 2008).

Langer (2011) describes a literary experience as essentially interiorized. When reading literary texts, readers consider various perspectives and use their personal knowledge, fantasy and previous experiences when exploring different perspectives. However, although a literary text may permit alternative interpretations, these must rely on what is actually expressed in the text (Langer, 2011). In literature instruction, students are sometimes encouraged to seek for *the* meaning, but, especially with complex texts, there is an intricate web of meanings that might compete with each other (Rabinowitz & Bancroft, 2014). This is why a literary text cannot be said to have one single meaning. Nevertheless, it is valuable to discuss the author's intentions, as well as how readers experience the text (Rabinowitz & Bancroft, 2014). When reading and interpreting literary texts, readers often want to show that the text says one thing but means something else, but it is of vital importance that readers pay attention to what is expressed "on the lines", and to read for mimesis (Agrell, 2003). Agrell (2003) draws on ideas launched by Barthes (1974) and argues that it is essential to focus on what the text says, and to treat it is as something that

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is *readerly*. However, literary texts are often treated as *writerly*. Then readers elaborate on them and make interpretations beyond the lines.

Dialogic teaching

Classroom discourse always includes some kind of communication, and therefore, it can be described as inherently dialogic. Nevertheless, when teachers control what questions are asked as well as what answers are accepted, it can be perceived as monologic (Nystrand et al., 1997). Although high-quality discussions about literary texts are considered valuable, classroom discourse is nevertheless often characterised by recitation, which implies that the teacher dominates and controls discussions, and that most instruction is about what is already known (Nystrand et al., 1997). In situations when dialogic discourse and high-quality discussions occur, students are the ones expressing ideas and opinions, but open-ended and authentic questions (i.e. questions for which there are no predefined answers) from teachers prompt them to develop their thoughts. In addition to this, it is relevant that the discussion incorporates a high degree of uptake. Then participants interact and ask each other for clarification. Teachers' uptake validate students' answers, and follow-up questions from teachers and peers help shaping the course of talk (Soter et al., 2008). In educational settings, the teacher always has a professional responsibility for guiding the classroom discourse, and for *authoring* (see Bakhtin) the classroom (Skaftun, 2019). However, in dialogic teaching, students and teachers are all subjects who contribute to authoring the classroom.

When investigating classroom discourse, it is important to pay equal attention to the quality of teacher and student talk (Alexander, 2018). Investigating and exploring students' talk is critical since it shapes students' thinking, learning and understanding. The teacher's talk is important since it can facilitate, probe and/or extend students' talk. Thus, it is important to consider what students say, but also how teachers follow up their answers. Nystrand et al. (1997) stresses that the effectiveness of instructional discourse is a matter of the quality of teacher-student interaction. The quality of for example literary discussions depends on to what extent students are able to take an active part the discussion. Therefore, it is important that students are encouraged to contribute to the generation of new understandings. Langer (2011) supports this notion and points out that it is important that all students take part in the classroom discourse, and that they are allowed and invited to express their own opinions. Preferably, discussions start with what students already know, but it is important that students are encouraged to modify and

expand their ideas. Then, the teacher's role is primarily to moderate and direct the discussion, which can unfold in various ways depending on what participants bring up (Nystrand et al., 1997). This kind of discourse involves comparatively few teacher questions but many conversational turns. Consequently, it generally becomes more thematic than recitation, and it has the potential to become more coherent, more sustained and in-depth.

Dialogic teaching can be understood and interpreted in various ways, and it can be discussed whether it is marked by the specific *forms* of discourse (e.g. the use of authentic questions, uptake and students' use of reasoning words) or by the *function* of utterances within the classroom discourse (Boyd & Markarian, 2011). When discussing effective teacher talk, is often expected that the function of talk can be determined by its form, for instance by the use of authentic questions. However, even when a question appears to be open and dialogic, it might function in a monologic way, and in a dialogic classroom, also closed questions can contribute to extended discussions and elaborated talk among the participants. Thus, what really matters is how the teacher's talk and intentions are perceived in a situated, social context, and the outward appearance of talk structures in a classroom does not necessarily reveal the underlying dynamic of learning (Boyd & Markarian, 2011). However, based on an analysis of different perspectives on dialogic teaching, Kim and Wilkinson (2019) draw the conclusion that in dialogic teaching syntactic form, interactional form, and function are all related. They claim that, although seemingly closed questions can open dialogue, form and function mostly work in unison.

Even though we often talk about open and closed questions, there can be a confusion in how they are to be understood. According to Worley (2015), this confusion sometimes depends on how questions function semantically and syntactically. He explains that *grammatically*, questions can be open and closed. Simultaneously, they can be either *conceptually* open or closed. The grammatical structure of a question decides whether it elicits a short, atomic answer, or whether it demands more than a one-word or short-phrase answer. Conceptually open questions invite answers that contain tensions, conflicts and controversies, whereas conceptually closed questions do not. Worley (2015) points out that this distinction between different kinds of questions explains how and why certain kinds of questions encourage enquiry discussions. He claims that since grammatically open questions tend to lack focus and specificity, they can in fact be a hindrance in discussions. Therefore, he favour questions that are grammatically closed but conceptually open. Teachers can

open up such questions by using "the question X" in order to invite students to, for example, clarify, exemplify and justify their originally brief answers.

When it comes to *what* literary discussions are about, readers' personal knowledge and experiences are indeed important when they develop their understanding of a literary text, but when the text is interpreted, it is crucial to pay attention to what it is actually about (Agrell, 2003; Langer, 2011). Previously, reader-oriented and text-oriented approaches have been seen as conflicting positions (Winkler, 2020), but Henschel et al. (2016) found that these two approaches seem to complement each other. In their study, empathy slightly increased when students performed reader-oriented tasks, whereas text-based tasks improved students' form-related comprehension. Alexander (2008, 2018) talks about five different principles of dialogic teaching. Three of them relate to the dynamics of talk and imply that the classroom is a site of joint learning and enquiry (*collective*) where participants listen to each other, share thoughts and consider alternative ideas (*reciprocal*), and where they feel safe and comfortable enough to express ideas freely (*supportive*). The *cumulative* principle implies that participants built on their own and others' ideas. It refers to the meaning of talk and is, according to Alexander (2018), the most difficult principle for teachers to enact. When dialogic teaching is *purposeful*, classroom talk is open and dialogic, and it is structured and planned with certain learning goals in view.

Methods

This study focuses on literary discussions in Swedish and Norwegian language arts classrooms. It is part of Linking Instruction and Student Achievement (LISA), which is a large-scale video study capturing naturally occurring instruction in the Nordic countries (see Klette et al., 2017; Tengberg et al., 2021). The same design was used in all countries, and all students taking part in the study were in the first year of lower secondary school (i.e., grade seven in Sweden, and grade eight in Norway). Before the data collection began, all teachers, students and students' guardians were informed about the research project, and about their rights as participants in it. Ethical consent guidelines were followed, and informed consent was signed by participating teachers, students, and student guardians. Two fixed cameras (one capturing the teacher and one capturing the students) simultaneously recorded the same lesson. This has made it possible to follow the instruction from two different perspectives. As for the recording of audio, the teacher carried one microphone, and there was another microphone in the ceiling in the middle of the classroom. In this

way, it was possible to obtain good audio for the teacher's talk and reasonably good audio for whole-class discourse, although it is sometimes difficult to hear what individual students say. For this study, it has been highly important to find discussions where students' contributions, as well as the teacher's questions and comments, are possible to discern.

In the full sample from 38 Swedish and 46 Norwegian classrooms (which includes different kinds of instruction) 42 literary discussions lasting at least five minutes have been identified (Norway N = 26; Sweden = 16), but in the present study, only whole-class discussions will be included. Once the discussions have been transcribed, they will be coded in two different ways. To be able to determine the dialogicality of the discussions, and to find out how teachers and students co-construct meaning and understanding, I intend to use Scheme for Educational Dialogue Analysis (SEDA) (Hennessy et al., 2016) and code the discussions on a micro level. SEDA includes 33 communicative acts (CA) that are grouped into eight different clusters. In this way, I will be able to find out if and how teachers (and students) invite ideas, elaboration and/or reasoning, as well as how they express ideas, make reasoning explicit and/or build on previous ideas. In addition to this, I will calculate the number and length of utterances in order to find out if teachers or students control the discussion.

To be able to find out how discussions unfold and what they are about, and to figure out what perspectives guide the interpretation and understanding of the literary texts, a different kind of analysis will be needed and codes, or themes, will have to be developed in an explorative way.

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