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Inquiry in the Nordic L1 Literature Curricula

Abstract

This paper presents a comparative analysis of L1 curricula in Norway, Sweden and Denmark as framing of cases and data analysis in the QUALE project to investigate how literature is attributed value in the L1 curricula for lower-secondary school. The point of departure is that teaching literature in Nordic L1 classrooms is comparable across countries by virtue of common cultural and curricular characteristics, as it can be used to frame analyzes in a multiple case study. At the same time, previous comparative analyzes also point to a number of essential differences. They can both indicate more profound socio-cultural differences in contextual factors and in themselves constitute a difference in terms of their status as a curricular framework for literature teaching. The QUALE project study local transformations of a learning resource designed for inquiry-oriented literature education. In addition to explore students` and teachers` enactment, adaptation and understanding of literature teaching, we also investigate contextual factors that might co-shape the transformations, and conditions for inquiry-oriented teaching in the Nordic countries. Comparative analyses of the L1 curricula in the three countries provide valuable insight about the didactical these transformations take place in. The analysis has implications for our assumptions about teachers` transformation of the QUALE program theory.

Inquiry in The Nordic L1 Literature Curricula

This paper presents a comparative analysis of L1 curricula in Norway, Sweden and Denmark as framing of cases and data analysis in the QUALE project in order to investigate how literature is attributed value in the L1 curricula for lower-secondary school. The point of departure is that teaching literature in Nordic L1 classrooms is comparable across countries by virtue of common cultural and curricular characteristics, as it can be used to frame analyzes in a multiple case study. Yet, previous comparative analyzes also point to a number of essential differences (Gourvennec et al., 2020; Herrlitz et al., 2007; Kaspersen, 2012; Ongstad, 2012). They can both indicate more profound socio-cultural differences in contextual factors and in themselves constitute a difference in terms of their status as a curricular framework for literature teaching.

In line with the QUINT ambition which aims at understanding teaching quality from multiple perspectives, the QUALE project study local transformations of a learning resource designed for inquiry-oriented literature education, as well as contextual factors that might co-shape the transformations.

Preliminary analysis of empirical findings from QUALE`s development phase and Intervention I, point toward local differences related to both rather practical matters, such as the period of time, teachers find fitting to reserve for literature teaching (and/or the QUALE

intervention) within a semester, and regarding topics of a more complex character, for example teachers' perceptions on students learning outcome. Comparative analyses of the L1 curricula provide valuable insight about the didactical reality (Winther-Jensen, 2004) these transformations take place in.

In this paper, we investigate the role of literature in the L1 curricula for lower-secondary school in Denmark, Sweden and Norway. Our analyses are guided by these research questions:

- How is literature and aesthetic texts perceived and conceptualized in the L1 curricula?
- How is literature as content and literature teaching as methods attributed value in the L1 curricula?
- What purposes for literature teaching and strategies for legitimation is emphasized in the L1 curricula?

Preliminary analyzes

In line with the QUALE ambition to study the didactic practice, the didactic reality, and the didactic theory both within each case's national context, and across cases in a Nordic context, we focus on similarities and differences, and investigate elements within each curriculum, and interpret them in a national discourse on literature teaching.

One example of a case/nation specific change in didactic reality in which the QUALE intervention takes place, is the revision of the national curriculum in Norway, that was implemented in 2020, alongside the early stages of QUALE's development phase.

The Norwegian Curriculum Renewal (Fagfornyelsen) entails a new core curriculum, new subject curricula, and a revised definition of competence, emphasizing in-depth learning. Also, three interdisciplinary themes were introduced: *Health and life skills*, *Democracy and citizenship* and *Sustainable development*. Across the subject curricula, these topics are framed within a subject-specific context. In the core curriculum (UDIR) one can read that life skills "refers to the ability to understand and influence factors that are important for mastering one's own life". The students are supposed to work with matters such as "value choices and the importance of meaning in life and relations with others, the ability to draw boundaries and to respect others' boundaries, and the ability to deal with thoughts, feelings and relationships". Further, the L1 curriculum state that «Reading fiction and factual prose can both confirm and challenge the pupils' self-image, thereby contributing to identity development and life skills". Following researcher in literature didactics Judith Langer (2011), the literary experience "involves openness and inquiry—where we continually search for and 'try out' possibilities for the moment and for the future" (Langer, 2011, p. 29). As Langer (2013) emphasizes, "reading literature involves cognitive dimensions that are critical components of intellectual development". We focus on the role of literature in the new L1 curriculum and aim to reflect upon the potential for an inquiry-oriented approach to literature education, focusing on the three interdisciplinary topics.

The current Danish curriculum, *Common Objectives* [Fælles Mål], was introduced in 2014 together with a concept of competence, where competencies formally consist of skills and knowledge. This was the basis for the construction of *Common Objectives*, where competence goals are broken down into pairs of skills and knowledge goals based on a notion that the fulfillment of these goal pairs (more or less automatically) leads to the competencies for

which goals are set. Both competence goals, skills goals and the (now former) indicative learning goals were formulated as goals for what the students should be able to do. All learning in school was perceived as a question of what the student can do, cf. also the way in which several learning platforms calculate learning ("can/can not").

What is particularly characteristic of the common concept of competencies is that they relate to the application of skills and knowledge in specific situations and contexts. This applies to both the definition in the European reference framework for qualifications and in the Danish qualifications framework for lifelong learning. Both the application aspect and the application context are weak in the thinking about competencies in *Common Objectives* - the students must consistently "be able", not necessarily "be able to apply", and only rarely in situations.

The premise is thus that the competence goals set goals for the students' competencies, and that competencies are skills. In many cases, the competency goals in *Common Objectives* do not formulate goals that relate to competencies, but rather overall skills.

In the subject Danish, interpretive competence is used to describe the general skills and processes that characterize the approach to literature. The description is relatively abstract, but it is linked to a specific choice of content, as Denmark has a canon of authorship. As a subject, Danish is therefore torn between highly abstract competencies and a very specific content.

Further analyzes, including the Swedish L1 curriculum¹ will be conducted, and presented in the QUALE symposium.

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¹ Including the subject curricula in *Swedish* and *Swedish as a second language*.

