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**Investigating critical literacy instruction through videotaped lessons..**

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Title: **Investigating critical literacy instruction through videotaped lessons across Nordic L1 classrooms – issues and tensions in conceptualization, operationalization, and ethics**

**Abstract** (300 words)

Critical literacy is an expanding research field in the world, in particular in a South-African, Australian, and American context, but less so in Europe (Pandya et al., 2021). Even though there has been a growing interest for the field in some of the Nordic countries in the last decade (cf. Blikstad-Balas & Foldvik, 2017; Daugaard, 2017; Lundgren & Damber, 2015), there is still a lack of empirical studies of critical literacy from Nordic classrooms, especially at the secondary level (Veum et al., 2021). In a study of videotaped lessons across Nordic L1 lower-secondary classrooms (Norwegian, Swedish, Danish, Swedish-Finnish, and Icelandic classrooms, n = 35), I focus on investigating the extent and characteristics of critical literacy instruction. As a theoretical lens, I apply Hilary Janks' framework that focuses on four specific dimensions of critical literacy: *power, diversity, access, and de- and re-construction* (Janks, 2000; 2010). However, in the endeavor of applying Janks' theoretical dimensions (developed in a South-African context) to the empirical data, some challenges have arisen, concerning conceptualization, operationalization, and ethics. In this paper, I therefore discuss the following questions: (1) How could dimensions of critical literacy be conceptualized in order to be an appropriate framework for investigating Nordic L1 classrooms? (2) How could critical literacy instruction be operationalized in a way that capture features of instruction that are aligned with both critical literacy theory and Nordic L1 traditions? And (3) what ethical issues may need to be considered in applying critical literacy theory in a Nordic context? In discussing these questions, I provide examples of analysis of the video data, and focus on issues of conceptualization, operationalization, and ethics. This discussion-based paper thus fits well with the conference ambition to examine and discuss "ways of conceptualizing teaching quality" and "difficulties in operationalization".

**Extended summary** (1000 words, excluding reference list) Include introduction, theoretical background, methods, aims, preliminary findings/findings, results, theoretical and education significance, relevance to the QUINT ambition and the reference list.

**Introduction**

Critical literacy is well established as a major ideological construct influencing literacy education (Behrman, 2006; Mills, 2016), and a central purpose of critical literacy in schools is for students to develop the ability to understand and question power relations and inequality – key skills individual needs "to survive and thrive in the world" (Pandya et al., 2021, p. 3). When analyzing teaching quality, we should therefore also take into account whether students are given the opportunity to develop their critical literacy competence.

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In Nordic L1 curricula, critical thinking and critical approaches to texts are apparent, however, how to develop critical literacy skills seems to be unclear in Nordic educational settings (Molin et al., 2018). In a Norwegian context, less than half of the students in PISA 2018 reported that they had learned to make evaluations of credibility and trustworthiness of texts at school (Weyergang & Frønes, 2020). There is thus a need for a stronger focus on how to integrate critical literacy in Nordic classroom instruction.

Around the world, critical literacy is an expanding research field, in particular in a South-African, Australian, and American context, but less so in Europe (Pandya et al., 2021). Even though there has been a growing interest for the field in some of the Nordic countries in the last decade, (cf. Blikstad-Balas & Foldvik, 2017; Daugaard, 2017; Lundgren & Damber, 2015; Molloy, 2017; Nestlog & Larsson, 2016; Olin-Scheller & Tengberg, 2017; Veum & Skovholt, 2020; Weyergang & Frønes, 2020), there is still a lack of empirical studies of critical literacy from Nordic classrooms, especially at the secondary level (Veum et al., 2021).

### **Theoretical framework**

In a study of videotaped lessons across Nordic L1 lower-secondary classrooms (n= 35), I focus on investigating the extent and characteristics of critical literacy instruction. As a theoretical lens, I apply Hilary Janks' framework that focuses on four specific dimensions of critical literacy: *power*, *diversity*, *access*, and *de- and re-construction* (Janks, 2000; 2010). These dimensions are frequently employed in international research literature (Pandya et al., 2021) and in - the however limited - Nordic research literature focusing on aspects of critical literacy (cf. Damber & Lundgren, 2015; Ekvall, 2013; Hultin & Westman, 2015; Veum & Skovholt, 2020). Applying Janks' theoretical model of critical literacy as an analytical framework across Nordic classrooms could contribute not only to knowledge about the empirical validity of this framework, but it could also illuminate aspects of the cultural validity of its use in a Nordic context. The model was developed in a South-African school context to explicitly counteract the ideology of the apartheid regime, and as we do not have the same historical background in the Nordic countries, this may constitute a cultural bias of the model, which would make an interesting contribution to the discussion of how such frameworks can travel across contexts. However, in the endeavor of applying Janks' theoretical dimensions to the empirical data – investigating critical literacy instruction through *videotaped lessons across Nordic L1 classrooms* – some challenges have arisen, concerning conceptualization, operationalization, and ethics.

### **Aim and research questions**

In order to build a strong validity argument for why the design, and consequently the findings, of a study investigating critical literacy through a theoretical framework developed in a South-African context is relevant and important for Nordic classrooms, I discuss the following questions:

- i. How could dimensions of critical literacy be conceptualized in order to be an appropriate framework for investigating Nordic L1 classrooms?
- ii. How could critical literacy instruction be operationalized in a way that capture features of instruction that are aligned with both critical literacy theory and Nordic L1 traditions?
- iii. What ethical issues may need to be considered in applying critical literacy theory in a Nordic context?

### **Discussion points and empirical examples**

In discussing the research questions, I highlight the following points: Regarding issues of **conceptualization**, I consider what ways issues of *power* and *diversity* in and through texts are expressed in a Nordic context, and what it means for students in Nordic classrooms to have *access*. When it comes to issues of **operationalization**, I discuss what issues of *power* and *diversity* in and through texts look like in Nordic L1 classrooms, and how the dimension of *access* can be observed. Furthermore, a validity issue concerns the use of video observation as the only methodological approach; for example, teacher intentions and beliefs, and student group characteristics, will be excluded from the analysis – which are factors that traditionally have informed critical literacy analysis. I discuss what implications this have for the analysis, and whether it is possible to make valid inferences based solely on the observations. Important **ethical issues** are related to the following concerns: Can we assume that the teachers are exposed to and familiar with critical literacy? If they are not, why would one assume that they are in a position to enact critical literacy practices in their classrooms? Furthermore, if what we are looking for isn't there (or not accessible for researchers), will it then be fair to publish the analyses? To illustrate some of these discussion points, I will provide examples of analysis of the video data, related to how texts are talked about and discussed in the Nordic L1 classrooms.

### **Significance of the study**

If well conceptualized and operationalized, and ethical issues are attended to, the critical literacy study will provide knowledge of the extent of critical literacy instruction in Nordic L1 classrooms, and – if and when enacted in the classrooms – the analyses will provide insight into how this feature is integrated in L1 classrooms in naturally occurring instructional settings. However, ahead of such findings, this discussion-based paper fits well with the conference ambition to examine and discuss “ways of conceptualizing teaching quality” and “difficulties in operationalization”.

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