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TITLE: Literary Discussions in Danish, Norwegian and Swedish Lower Secondary Classrooms

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Abstract (296 words)

Classroom discussions can be an important way for students to develop their understanding of literary texts. Previous research has shown that certain features characterize high-quality literary discussions, but we know little about how teachers make use of literary discussions in their everyday teaching, and how they then interact with their students. Therefore, this study will contribute with valuable knowledge. The study focuses on literary discussions taking place in a Nordic setting. It aims to investigate how teachers and students in six lower secondary Danish, Norwegian and Swedish classrooms co-construct meaning and understanding in whole-class discussions about literary text, and to find out whether these discussions have text-oriented, reader-oriented or mixed foci. The study relies on video data from LISA Nordic. Two whole-class discussions from each of the three countries will be selected and subsequently analysed. The Scheme for Educational Dialogue Analysis (SEDA) will be used to code teacher-student interaction, but other methods will be needed to capture other aspects of these discussions. Since only a limited number of discussions will be included in the study, it will not be possible to draw general conclusions about literary discussions in Nordic lower secondary instruction. However, it will be valuable to find out if and how teachers from different contexts favour different methods and approaches. Thus, it will be more relevant to pay attention to variation than to seek for prevalent patterns. Analysis is only at its very beginning, but tentative findings from two literary discussions taking place in a Swedish context indicate that using students' names is one way for teachers to invite everyone into the discussion. Whereas one of the discussions can be described as clearly text-oriented, the participants of the other discussion primarily use the text as a starting-point when associating to aspects beyond the text.

Extended summary (995 words, excluding reference list)

Introduction

Classroom discussions can be an important way for students to develop their understanding of literary texts (Wilkinson et al., 2015), and measuring and assessing literary discussions can be a way to conceptualize teaching quality. Not all discussions are productive, and the fact that teachers let their students talk about literary texts does not automatically mean that students' comprehension of the text is enhanced (Murphy et al., 2009). Previous research has identified a number of things that characterize high-quality literary discussions (Soter et al., 2008), and studies launched by researchers (see e.g. Gourvennec, 2016; 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. Therefore, the aim of this study is to investigate and assess literary discussions taking place in naturally occurring language arts instruction in Danish, Norwegian and Swedish lower secondary classrooms (grade 7 in Denmark and Sweden, and grade 8 in Norway). Rather than seeking for prevalent patterns, I intend to pay attention to variation. My research questions are:

- How do teachers and lower secondary students co-construct meaning and understanding in whole class discussions about literary texts?
- Do these discussions primarily have text-oriented or reader-oriented foci? To what extent are these foci combined?

Theoretical background

According to Nystrand (1997), 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 claims 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. However, 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 control discussions, and that most instruction is about what is already known. When teachers use so-called "test-questions" or "known information questions" to check students' understanding of a literary text, they generally receive brief answers. Since this kind of questions can make topic shifts abrupt, the discussion often becomes disconnected (Nystrand, 1997).

In situations when high-quality discussions occur, students are the ones expressing ideas and opinions, although open-ended and authentic questions from teachers prompt them to develop their thoughts. It is also relevant that the discussion incorporates a high degree of uptake (Soter et al., 2008), which means that the 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. Authentic questions, uptake and cognitive demand questions are valuable since they afford students considerable control over the discussion and help them construct knowledge and understanding (Wilkinson et al., 2015).

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 (Langer, 2011). Previously, reader-oriented and text-oriented approaches have been seen as conflicting positions (Winkler, 2020), but

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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.

Methods

This study focuses on literary discussions in Danish, Norwegian and Swedish language arts classrooms. It is part of Linking Instruction and Student Achievement (LISA), which captures naturally occurring instruction in the Nordic countries (see Klette et al., 2017; Tengberg et al., 2021). In the full sample from 10 Danish, 46 Norwegian and 38 Swedish classrooms more than 35 literary discussions lasting at least five minutes have been identified. However, in the present study, extended whole-class discussions from six different classrooms (two from each of the countries) will be selected and investigated. These discussions will vary in different ways. They will, for example, be based on various kinds of texts, and teachers will use different methods when inviting students to share their opinions and ideas about the texts.

Once all six discussions have been transcribed, I intend to code them in two different ways. First, I will use the Scheme for Educational Dialogue Analysis (SEDA) (Hennessy et al., 2016) 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. I will also calculate the number and length of utterances in order to find out if teachers or students control the discussion. Second, I will investigate whether the discussions are primarily focused on the text (e.g. content, form or genre features) or on readers (and their experiences), or if the interplay of text and reader is stimulated and emphasized in the discussions.

Preliminary findings

Since only a limited number of literary discussions are included in the present study, it will not be possible to draw general conclusions about the way Danish, Norwegian and Swedish teachers and students co-construct meaning and understanding in literary discussions. Nevertheless, it will be valuable to find out if and how different methods and approaches related to literary discussions are used in different classrooms.

Analysis is only at its very beginning, but findings from two literary discussions taking place in a Swedish context indicate that using students' names can be a way for teachers to invite everyone to share his or her ideas and opinions about the text. Whereas the discussion in one of the classrooms concerned what happens in the story, and why characters act in certain ways, the participants of the other discussion used the text as a starting point and associated to aspects beyond the text. When doing so, they relied on their personal experiences.

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