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Inquiry dialogue to promote comprehension and interpretation.

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Title of your paper: Inquiry dialogue to promote comprehension and interpretation. Effects of an intervention to improve the quality of teacher-led discussions about complex literary texts.

Abstract

The quality of text-based discussions is essential to students' reading engagement and comprehension. Qualified implementation of discussion can foster an explorative and cooperative attitude in students that promotes interpretation and analysis of more complex texts. However, studies show that such discussions are largely absent from today's classrooms, partly because many teachers experience that to lead open-ended, probing discussions about complex texts is a challenging task, they distrust their ability to do it, and ask for support in terms of useful discussion models.

The purpose of this research is to examine whether repeated criteria-based feedback to teachers followed by video-based group reflection improves the quality of teacher-led discussions about complex literary texts in lower secondary. The study is designed as a year-long intervention to support language arts teachers' enactment of a specific type of talk called "Inquiry Dialogue" (ID). It is hypothesized that the intervention will enhance the quality of discussions and improve teachers' self-efficacy related to classroom discussions. It is also hypothesized that the implementation of ID will support students' comprehension and interpretation, and their reading-related self-efficacy.

To test these hypotheses, the study uses a single-group pre-/posttest design, including 35 teachers and their 8 grade classes. Measures before and after intervention include quality of discussions (coding by protocol), teacher and student self-efficacy (surveys), and student reading ability (comprehension and interpretation tests).

The study draws on previous research conducted within Theme 3 of QUINT, particularly the LISA-PLOT and the VIST studies, in that feedback sessions and video-based analysis of instruction are vital parts of the professional development. It adds to the knowledge already produced within QUINT by providing systematic analyses of both instructional development and student learning. As the study is still ahead of data collection, the presentation will focus on study design rather than empirical results.

Extended summary

[Introduction](#)

Previous research indicates that the quality of teacher-led text-based discussions is essential to students' reading engagement and comprehension (Nystrand, 1997; Murphy et al., 2009). Qualified implementation of discussion can foster an explorative and cooperative attitude in students that promotes interpretation and analysis of more complex texts (Levine & Horton, 2015; Wilkinson et al., 2017). For young readers, among which many risk losing interest for reading, particularly literary reading, across the school years, it is important to meet thought-provoking texts that challenges their perception and invite them to engage in interpretation and collective inquiry. However, studies show that such discussions

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are largely absent from today's classrooms, partly because many teachers experience that to lead open-ended, probing discussions about complex texts is a challenging task, they distrust their ability to do it, and ask for support in terms of useful discussion models (Hacker & Tenent, 2002; Höglund et al., 2020; Murphy et al., 2016). The present study represents an attempt to confront these challenges through a structured form of researcher-teacher collaboration. It investigates whether observation and criteria-based feedback to teachers combined with video-based group reflection can improve the quality of teacher-led discussions about literary texts.

Theoretical background

The present study build on three different theoretical tenets. The first one is dialogic learning theory (Alexander, 2020; Nystrand et al., 1997), which provides a framework for explaining the relationship between dialogic structuring of text-based discussions and development of students' reasoning and reading ability. Dialogic structuring of discussions refers to the use of open-ended questions, of asking students to elaborate on their ideas, encourage them to maintain independent interpretations, but also to challenge their assumptions, asking students to compare and consider each other's viewpoint as a pedagogical strategy for practicing collective reasoning and judgment.

The second theoretical tenet deals with aesthetic *defamiliarization* in literary texts (Miall, 2006; Shklovsky, 2007). Defamiliarization means a restructuring of perception as a poetic function and occurs when readers' habitual perception is subverted by elements in the text that 'stand out' and cause bewilderment and require interpretation. Defamiliarizing experiences from reading complex literary texts have been examined as a resource for alerting students' attention to the process of interpretation in literary reading (Johansen, 2018; Sønneland, 2019). The present study goes on to design an intervention on the assumptions that 1) the defamiliarizing potential can be used pedagogically, and 2) teachers' enactment of text-based discussion can be supported to improve the collective exploration of complex stories.

The third theoretical tenet concerns the use of systematic observations, joint video-based analysis, and criteria-based peer feedback as a way of accessing the complexity of authentic classroom situations for situated reflection and collaborative exploration of teaching activities to build new practical knowledge and improve the instruction (Borko et al., 2017; Brophy, 2004). Studies have shown that when teachers participate in defining the problem and in identifying the required change of practice, they can learn to apply new knowledge more flexibly and even make greater use of general principles (Gore et al., 2017). From video-recordings of their own teaching, and repeated feedback on research-based criteria, teachers can develop a practice-based awareness that can be applied in strategic and efficient pedagogical action (Allen et al., 2011; Cohen et al., 2016).

Aims

The purpose of the study is to examine whether repeated criteria-based feedback to teachers followed by video-based group reflection improves the quality of teacher-led discussions about complex literary texts in lower secondary. The research is designed as a year-long intervention to support language arts teachers' enactment of a specific type of talk called "Inquiry Dialogue" (ID). It is hypothesized that the intervention will enhance the quality of discussions and improve teachers' self-efficacy related to classroom discussions. It is also hypothesized that the implementation of ID will support students' comprehension and interpretation, and their reading-related self-efficacy.

Methods

To test these hypotheses, the study uses a single-group pre-/posttest design, including 35 lower secondary Swedish language arts teachers, who will implement ID in their 8th grade classrooms from Oct through May. Implementation of ID will include teacher-led whole-class discussions using a project-specific sample of complex short stories, and support for instructional development through repeated individual observation and feedback and video-based group reflection. Measures before and after intervention include quality of discussions (coding by protocol), teacher and student self-efficacy (surveys), and student reading ability (comprehension and interpretation tests).

Intervention effects on dependent variables will be analyzed through MANCOVA, while relationships between discussion quality, teacher and student self-efficacy, and student reading ability will be analyzed using multilevel analyses.

Results

As the study is yet in an initial state, and there are currently no empirical data available, the purpose of the presentation is not to present results, but rather to invite to a discussion about study design, implementation of collaborative intervention, and analytic strategies. However, previous studies, conducted by members of the research team, has shown that intentional pedagogical use of multilayered and complex literature can be treated by students as genuine interpretive problems and stimulate authentic reading engagement and discussion (Johansson & Nordenstam, 2017; Sønneland, 2019; Tengberg et al., 2015). Moreover, professional development studies has shown that combining observation of lessons with criteria-based feedback, and video-based group reflection is effective to support development of reading instruction (Tengberg et al, in press; Tengberg & Wejrur, 2019). The current study, thus, builds on promising results from previous research.

Theoretical and education significance

The project is expected to yield new and valuable knowledge about efficient ways to improve the quality of text-based discussions in school, and particularly to develop teachers' readiness to deal with complex literary texts. By measuring the development of both teachers' instructional self-efficacy, and students' reading-related self-efficacy and reading ability across the intervention, the study is expected to contribute with a more nuanced understanding of the relationship between teacher professional development and student learning. Such knowledge is highly significant both for future school development and for teacher education.

Relevance to the QUINT ambition

As noted, the study draws on previous research within QUINT Theme 3 research, specifically the LISA-PLOT and the VIST studies, and represents a systematic and up-scaled version of attempting to answer research questions similar to those examined in LISA-PLOT and VIST. The project is thus both a genuine intellectual offspring of the QUINT research, and a fruitful use of the resources made available through the QUINT centre (the project received a 4,5 MSEK funding).

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Author: Michael Tengberg
Inquiry dialogue to promote comprehension and interpretation.

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Author: Michael Tengberg

Inquiry dialogue to promote comprehension and interpretation.

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