

LITERATURE EDUCATION IN NORDIC L1s

Cultural models of national lower-secondary curricula in Denmark, Finland,
Norway and Sweden

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Abstract

This study aims to shed light on the cultural models of literature and literature education reflected in Nordic L1 curricula by investigating how literature is given discursive significance in the Danish, Finnish, Norwegian and Swedish L1 curricula for lower-secondary school, both within and across those four countries. Education in the Nordic countries is a field well suited for comparative analysis as the languages used are closely related and the countries' educational systems and policies are similar. In the study, we discuss how literary texts are given significance compared with other texts and what purposes of literature education are given a prominent place in the L1 curricula. The theoretical framework used derives from Gee's (2014) description of cultural models; we understand the national curricula as linguistically created realms of reality. The comparative analysis suggests that there are similar tendencies as well as distinct national differences. Prominent cultural models identified across the countries are a double position of literary texts and a high expectation on literature education. The study points to a need to discuss the status and purpose of literary texts in the Nordic L1 subjects in order to promote further mutual understanding and inspiration across borders.

Keywords: L1 literature education, national curricula, cultural models, lower secondary education, comparative analysis, Nordic countries

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1. INTRODUCTION

Education in the Nordic countries¹ displays many commonalities across national borders. In L1 education in general, and literature education in particular, the Nordic countries have influenced each other (Elf & Kaspersen, 2012; Krogh & Penne, 2015). Dialogue between Nordic L1 school subjects, made possible by close relationships between languages² and similarities between national educational systems and policies, has created a fertile ground for comparative analysis of various issues, such as the planned, enacted or experienced curriculum (see e.g. Marsh & Willis, 2009). In this study, we focus on the planned aspect, that is, the official national curriculum documents, which can be claimed to change more rapidly, as part of ongoing political governance, than other aspects of school subjects such as classroom teaching practices or underlying approaches to the philosophy of science (Krogh, 2003, 2011).

Comparative analyses of Nordic L1 national curricula have recently been conducted in relation to the notion of multimodality (Elf et al., 2018) and also—to some extent—in relation to the framing of writing development (Jefferey et al., 2019). In addition, a recent comparative study (Holmberg et al., 2019) analysed patterns identified in PhD dissertations within Nordic L1 research in 2000–2017, finding that research into the teaching and reading of literature was the third main content area across the countries—after research into reading as a basic skill and research into writing. Further, a comparative study of literature as reflected in the Swedish and Danish national curricula for upper-secondary school (Sjöstedt, 2013) showed that while the Swedish curriculum focuses on the individual and on the students' desires, the Danish one has a more scholarly orientation and prescribes stronger central control. However, the study reported in this paper is the first to investigate current tendencies in literature education. More specifically, we investigate national curricula for lower-secondary school from Denmark, Finland (with a focus on the national L1 curriculum for Swedish and literature), Norway and Sweden in order to shed light on the cultural models of literature and literature education reflected in the Nordic L1 curricula. By doing so, we wish to contribute new and valuable knowledge about the prescribed status and purposes of literary texts and about literature education from a comparative perspective. It should be noted that in this paper we use the terms “literature” and “literary texts” to encompass written prose, poetry and drama. Hence those terms include most written fictional texts regardless of their format. This is in line with the terminological traditions of the Nordic L1 school subjects.

¹ *The Nordic countries are Denmark, Finland, Iceland (not included in the present study), Norway and Sweden.*

² *Danish, Norwegian and Swedish, all North Germanic languages, are mutually comprehensible. Swedish is also an official language in Finland, whose other official language, Finnish, is not closely related to the other Nordic languages.*

The previous research into varying tendencies in Nordic L1 literature education and curricula may be understood as relying upon what we, with Gee (2014), frame as cultural models of literature education. We understand national curricula as documents reflecting various notions of literature education. Knowledge about the different cultural models reflected in the Nordic L1 curricula may bring about greater awareness of various taken-for-granted perspectives on literature that are prevalent in educational contexts, both within and across the four countries. Such awareness may be beneficial both for future curriculum development and for mutual understanding and inspiration across borders.

In order to identify the presumptions underpinning literature education in the Nordic countries, this study investigates how literature is given discursive significance (Gee, 2014) in the various national curricula, both within and across the four countries. To gain knowledge about cultural models in the present L1 curricula, we ask the following research questions:

- 1) How are literary texts given significance compared with other texts in the four curricula?
- 2) What purposes of literature education are given significance in the four curricula?

The organization of the present paper is as follows: The next section describes the background and context of the present study by giving an overview of recent tendencies in Nordic L1 literature education as well as previous curriculum research in the Nordic region. This is followed by two sections on the theoretical framework and on methodological considerations, respectively. Then we address the two research questions, separately for each of the countries. This is followed by a discussion of cultural models identified and of cross-national tendencies as well as concluding remarks.

2. BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

Historically, literature has been firmly established at the core of the L1 subjects in the Nordic countries (Aase, 2002; Hansén, 1991; Martinsson, 1989; Skjelbred et al., 2017; Sørensen, 2008). However, while literature has thus retained a prominent position over time, the rationale for this position has changed. Further, the field of literature education in the Nordic countries is not entirely homogeneous, although several characteristics of its development are common across the region.

In the early 20th century, literature education focused on historical-biographical knowledge. At that time, the purposes of literature education were anchored in a tradition aiming to foster affinity with the nation-state; literature education had a clear nation-building objective (Hamre, 2014; Hansén, 1991; Kaspersen, 2012; Persson, 2007). The mid-20th century was characterised by a stronger focus on the text, with an emphasis on close reading and clear signs of influence from New Criticism (see e.g. Smidt, 2018). Since the 1970s, the reader has attracted considerable

interest in research into literature education. A Swedish research group called Pedagogiska gruppen ('The Pedagogical Group') exercised considerable influence over literature education as a discipline as well as over related research in the Nordic countries (see e.g. Kaihovirta-Rosvik et al., 2011; Molloy, 2008; Smidt, 1989). Its approach to the reading of literature emphasises the reader's ability to relate and to shift perspectives by combining the known with the unknown in order to engage with the text (Malmgren, 1986). This view is strongly influenced by American reader-response theory (e.g. Rosenblatt, 1978).

Hence, in recent decades, several purposes of literature education have existed in parallel. Literature reading is viewed as a specific competence, but also as an aesthetic experience and as a means to achieve, for example, personal development and growth. Students often represent the starting point when the purposes of literature education are to be defined; the aim is to create independent and active readers and to give room for the students' reception (see e.g. Hetmar, 1996; Rikama, 2004; Steffensen, 2005).

Even though literature has thus remained firmly established at the core of the L1 subjects in the Nordic countries, this position is constantly up for debate. For example, a shift towards a communicative paradigm (Sawyer & van de Ven, 2006) has been taking place in those subjects. This paradigm may be understood as parallel to, or subsumed under, a very strong trend to focus on literacy (Ongstad, 2018). However, the notion of literacy or literacies involves various models of literacy (see e.g. Barton, 2007; Gee, 2012; Street, 1995). Those models may be more or less in line with a communicative paradigm and more or less compatible with literature education. Further, in line with the technology developments of the past few decades, the set of texts studied has expanded to include various texts from the dynamic media landscape alongside the traditional text formats. This extended text concept has fuelled a discussion about where to draw the line between literary and non-literary texts. Rather than settling this issue once and for all, the main conclusion arrived at would appear to be that awareness of the situatedness of the dialogue between the reader and the text is significant for the perception of a text in any format.

According to Koskimaa (2007), the challenge of literature teaching is to work on literary texts while at the same time acknowledging the overall media landscape and the broad repertoire of texts, literary texts being seen as an integral part of this broader field. Felski (2008) suggests a similar approach, arguing that the subject of literary studies will need to reinvigorate its aims and approaches by forming closer links with the study of other media rather than clinging to unconvincing claims to unique status. However, Felski emphasises that "such collaborations will require, of course, scrupulous attention to the medium-specific features of artistic forms" (Felski, 2008, p. 22). This in fact supports the need to identify the current framings—both implicit and explicit—of literature education as reflected in contemporary Nordic L1 curricula. As Bruns (2011) puts it, "the challenge of justifying literary study is not only a matter of persuasion but also of conception" (p. 1).

The issue of which literary texts should be addressed and included in the L1 subjects has also become a topic of discussion. According to Krogh and Penne (2015), “[t]he traditional dyad of L1 as ‘language and literature’ now calls for quotation marks and appears more convincingly represented in the plural forms of languages, literatures, and literacies” (p. 5). More recently, Krogh et al. (2017) moved beyond this by suggesting, among other things, that the L1 subject of Danish should, in essence, have text reception and text production as its defining core activities at both primary and secondary level.

Kaspersen (2012) suggested that four main positions are represented in literature education in the Nordic countries: text-based, reader-oriented, socio-cultural and media-oriented. Rødnes (2014), on her part, identified two—somewhat dichotomous—types of approaches to research into literature education at Scandinavian secondary schools: experience-based approaches (characterised by orientation towards the student and rooted in reader-response theory) and analytic approaches (oriented towards the text and rooted in New Criticism) and went on to call for ways to bridge the gap between them. On a similar note, Steffensen et al. (2010) argued that an analytical approach to literature does not exclude paying attention to the reader’s experience of the text and hence that there is no need to focus exclusively on a text-oriented or a reader-oriented approach. However, although many researchers are in favour of combining those two approaches, the tension between focusing on the readers’ experiences and focusing on the literary texts and the conventions governing their readings does seem to represent one of the key questions dealt with in research into literature education in the Nordic countries over the past fifteen years. The questions asked seem to revolve either around what the reader does with the text or around what the text does with the reader, and the tension is described as representing a conflict between a focus on literary competence and a focus on literary experience (see e.g. Degerman, 2012; Ewald, 2015). Such a tension, involving somewhat contrastive visions of the purpose of literature education, has created what Faust (2000) refers to as a “double bind” (p. 26) for teachers as they struggle to achieve the objective of making students engage with literature on a personal level while at the same time upholding a commitment to authoritative readings.

In recent years, a new research interest in students’ disciplinary literacy in the literature classroom has emerged. This variant of the aforementioned trend to focus on literacy (Ongstad, 2018) or literacies (Krogh & Penne, 2015) draws inspiration from New Literacy Studies and integrates the literacy and literature classroom by addressing both descriptive questions of what the reader does (with the literary text in the classroom) and prescriptive questions of what counts as literary competence in compulsory literature education and of what the teacher does or—in particular—what he or she could do. Such a focus on disciplinary literacy has been particularly prevalent in Denmark and Norway (Gourvenec, 2017; Kabel, 2016; Skaftun, 2009).

3. PREVIOUS RESEARCH ON NORDIC L1 CURRICULA

To our knowledge, there are no previous cross-national studies of literature education in Nordic L1 national curricula. Nevertheless, several studies have investigated literature education in the L1 curricula of the individual countries, identifying in each case a wide range of explicitly described purposes (e.g. Hansén, 1991; Höglund, 2019; Persson, 2007; Rejman, 2013). Those previous curriculum studies demonstrate that, in the past 30 years, there has been an emphasis on literature education as a tool to shape students' personal growth and assist them in exploring their identity. Some of the findings from those studies are presented below, by country.

Kristjánsdóttir (2018, in press) presented a critical discourse analysis of the Danish national compulsory-education (years 0–9) curricula for the range of language subjects taught at school, that is, L1 Danish, Danish as a second/foreign language and foreign languages such as English and German. She pointed out that L1 Danish lacks identification in that it is not identified either as a language subject or as a cultural subject. According to Kristjánsdóttir's analysis, this results in a situation where the Danish language and, for example, Danish culture, including its literature, are pre-supposed as a given. This resonates to some extent with historical developments. In an analysis of subsequent L1 Danish curricula in the 20th century, Sørensen (2008) showed how the role of literature changed in 1958–1975 from offering, among other things, "ethical guidelines" (p. 154) to promoting students' own literary production and their acquisition of analytical tools rooted in New Criticism. For the period after 1975, Sørensen documented how, as a consequence of an extended notion of text, "high" literature was less prioritised until a new shift took place in the 1990s (see also Weinreich, 2001). In 2004, this shift was consolidated when a literary canon of Danish/Scandinavian authorships became part of the planned L1 curriculum.

In an analysis of literature education in the 2004 Finnish national curriculum, Rejman (2013) showed how literary reading is strongly associated with the idea of cultivating the students' personal growth. However, she also pointed to a discrepancy between the learning objectives and the grading criteria in how the visions for literature teaching are formulated: the high ambitions set out in the objectives are reduced to reading skills and basic knowledge of literary genres in the grading criteria. In a recent analysis of the 2014 Finnish curriculum, Höglund (2019) concluded that the objectives for literature teaching can be described as vast, incorporating both students' reading experiences, cultural understandings, analytical reading and—to some extent—knowledge of literature and its history. However, she also identified a considerable shift in the objectives for literature instruction towards promoting and encouraging reading interest and reading experiences.

When it comes to Norway, Hamre (2014) documented the rise and fall of classical, canonical literature at Norwegian schools from the 18th century onwards, finding that "high" literature played an unchallenged part in Norwegian nation-building efforts during the 19th century and for large parts of the 20th. According to Hamre (2014), the legitimisation of literature was tied to a national context and to what he

calls—with a reference to Wolfgang Klafki—“a material national Bildung” (p. 10). In the 1935 national curriculum, it was laid down that literature should provide students with insight into Norwegian culture, including fishing, farming and forestry, and into the different roles played by Norwegians on the world scene (see e.g. Smidt, 2018). However, as the wave of progressive education began to roll in during the 1930s and gained strength in the 1970s, the position of high literature was weakened by the challenge from non-fiction, proletarian literature, women’s literature, local literature, etc. (Hamre, 2014). The 21st century has seen a further weakening of the nation-building motive as more weight has been placed on international and national reading assessments. In parallel, as a result of the rise of new technologies, new text formats have started to compete with traditional literature. This development, in turn, has fuelled discussions about the legitimisation of literary texts at school (see e.g. Skaftun, 2009).

In the case of Sweden, Persson (2012) showed that the concept of culture was more significant in the 1994 national curriculum than in the present one, which dates from 2011, noting that literary texts are mentioned alongside “other types of texts”. Persson (2007) found that the reasons given for reading literature in Swedish curricula, policy documents and teaching material are rooted in notions of literature as a source of experience and knowledge, and as a means to develop language skills, create good reading habits and exert a positive influence on empathy and tolerance; all of those functions of literature education were collectively described as a means to promote democracy. This idea of a link between literature education and democracy is derived from various philosophers, including Martha Nussbaum (1997, 2010). Studies of the 2011 Swedish L1 curriculum (Liberg et al., 2012; Lundström et al., 2011) demonstrate that there have been significant changes with regard to the amount of attention paid to literature and the position assigned to it within that subject. Lundström et al. (2011) emphasised that literature teaching is increasingly dominated by a focus on text structure, discussing whether the aim of the trend towards specific knowledge requirements (in relation to the reading of literature) is to make literature reading more “measurable”.

Regardless of the dominant tendencies at different times, previous research thus shows that, both within and across the four countries, the position of literature education is and has been both multifaceted and ambiguous. There is and has been an emphasis on literature education as part of identity formation, where literature is expected to contribute to objectives such as personal growth, but many other facets have also been identified within and across the Nordic countries. Some of these facets are explicitly stated while others are implicit and thus depend on shared taken-for-granted perspectives. At the same time, there is an ongoing discussion about whether the position of literature education is challenged nowadays, among other things by an even stronger orientation towards measurable values and towards the use of a wider range of text types.

4. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In order to identify and understand similarities and differences across Nordic L1 curricula when it comes to literature education, we adopt a theoretical perspective grounded in socio-cultural theory. From this position, we consider the analysis of national curricula as a way to grasp *cultural models* of literature education in the Nordic countries. According to James Paul Gee (2003), cultural models are “images, story lines, principles, or metaphors that capture what a particular group finds ‘normal’ or ‘typical’ in regard to a given phenomenon” (p. 149). Gee’s reference to “group” here encompasses the entire range from a few people to the entire human race. In the investigation of national L1 curriculum documents, it may be possible to identify traces pertaining to a range of groups which have all exerted an impact, in one way or another, on the process of writing those documents. Those groups may include politicians, policy-makers in the educational field and teachers’ unions as well as researchers and scholars within various fields of education, literature, language, L1 studies, etc. In turn, each of those groups may represent a multitude of different smaller groups, and every single one of those groups will share various taken-for-granted perspectives.

In Gee’s opinion, “[c]ultural models are not true or false” (2003, p. 149) but capture a simplified notion of reality. According to Gee, people are not usually conscious of their cultural models, and those models are not defined once and for all. What researchers can do is to study people’s behaviour and use of language when acting as members of a certain type of group and then produce a verbal description of their cultural model—on the assumption that what those persons do and say must reflect their acceptance of a certain cultural model for a given phenomenon. Gee (2003) tends to draw his examples of cultural models from everyday social life: models of gender, of toddlers, of typical teenagers, and so on, but he emphasises that “the world is full of an endless array of ever-changing cultural models” (p. 151), meaning that our participation in the world must necessarily involve communication based on cultural models of numerous phenomena.

What we are looking for in this study—silent knowledge about things that are taken for granted in the world of L1 education—can thus be found through analysis of *language in context* (Gee, 2014). Hence, we also understand the national curricula under study as linguistically created realms of reality. Whenever we speak or write, we create links to various contexts and to various “worlds”. We always design what we say or write to suit a particular situation. In line with this, Gee (2014) suggests that discourse analysts should draw upon a metaphor of construction when faced with any piece of language: when we speak or write, we “build seven things or seven areas of ‘reality’” (p. 32). Those seven things or areas are referred to by Gee as building tasks. They include *Significance, Practices (Activities), Identities, Relationships, Politics, Connections* and *Sign Systems and Knowledge* (Gee, 2014). For the discourse analyst, they represent different perspectives that can each be foregrounded and explored.

5. METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

In this study, as a basis for a discussion about which cultural models underpin the curricula, we perform a discourse analysis where we pay particular attention to the building task of *Significance* (Gee, 2014). This means that the inquiry tool of Significance is used to “ask questions of” the national curricula—which we understand as linguistically created realms of reality—about how literature is given significance, both explicitly and implicitly, by its presence or absence and by its interpretation. Hence, we try to shed light on the positions assigned to literary texts, and thus also on the notions—or cultural models—of literary texts used, as well as on the purposes ascribed to literature education by the four L1 curricula.

We have chosen to study the curricula of lower-secondary school, which we see as an educational stage of particular interest. This is because, in the Nordic countries, where compulsory education comprises the first nine or ten years of school, lower-secondary school represents a transitory stage between comprehensive compulsory education, where all members of a peer group typically attend the same (type of) institution, and the much more diverse—as well as optional—world of upper-secondary education. Upon completion of lower-secondary school, students may continue to either vocational or general (academic) upper-secondary education, which is often dispensed in different institutional settings. Against this background, we consider the lower-secondary L1 curriculum to provide a significant statement about the competencies that all adolescents in each country are expected to acquire and to bring with them from the compulsory part of their schooling.

While there are differences between the Nordic L1 curricula, including in their design and length, there are also some important cross-national similarities which allow us to select comparable parts of them for closer analysis. First, all four curricula include a description of the overall purpose of L1 education at primary and lower-secondary school. Second, all curricula also show traces of a recent international trend towards the use of key competencies and assessable objectives (Bundsgaard, 2016; Jeffrey et al., 2019)—a trend characterised by Sawyer and van de Ven (2006) as part of a utilitarian paradigm within educational policy. This influence can be seen at the structural level in all four curricula. In Denmark, there are four key competence areas, with competence aims for years 1–2, 3–4, 5–6 and 7–9 as well as additional sets of content and skills objectives. In Finland, there are four key content areas, with content and skills objectives for years 1–2, 3–6 and 7–9 and knowledge requirements for the end of years 6 and 9. In Norway, each school subject is related to the five key competencies of writing, reading, oral, digital and numeracy. This also applies to the subject of L1 Norwegian except that numeracy was removed in 2019. There are competence aims and assessment descriptions for years 2, 4, 7 and 10. In Sweden, there are five key content areas and there are knowledge requirements for years 3, 6 and 9.

Owing to the use of objectives for different stages, lower-secondary school is described separately in all four national L1 curricula. This allows us to focus on the same

stage of schooling in our study. The overview given in Table 1 below lists the four curricula and specifies the parts chosen for a more detailed analysis.³

Table 1. Overview of the four Nordic national L1 curricula.

Country	Curriculum	Parts chosen for analysis
Denmark	National Curriculum for Danish (years 1–9), including <i>Common Standards</i> (2014; 2019) and supplements.	One of four key competence areas, “Interpretation”, and the specific common objectives (competence aims, content and skills objectives) for years 7–9. Purpose of Danish L1, Canon, Reading Plan and Teaching Guidelines.
Finland	2014 National Core Curriculum for Basic Education (2014): Mother tongue and literature (years 1–9)	Overarching description of the subject “Mother tongue and literature”, National L1 curriculum for “Swedish and Literature” (years 7–9), including specific tasks, key content areas, objectives of instruction and knowledge requirements.
Norway	National Curriculum for Norwegian (years 1–13) (2019)	Part 1 of the curriculum (“About the subject”: the subject’s relevance and central values, core elements, interdisciplinary themes, basic skills), competence aims, and formative and summative assessment (years 8–10).
Sweden	Curriculum for the compulsory school, preschool class and school-age educare: Syllabus for Swedish (years 1–9) (2011)	Aims, core content, knowledge requirements (years 7–9). Supplement.

It should be noted that—as is clear from the overview—two of the four curricula underwent partial revision as this paper was being written. This is well in line with the claim that changeability is a basic characteristic of L1 subjects, not least at the level of national curricula (Krogh, 2003, 2011), and it underscores the fact that our findings are situational and bound to the time of the study.

The analysis of curriculum texts with the intention of examining how literary texts are given significance (Research Question 1) and what purposes of literature education are given significance (Research Question 2) clearly involves an interpretative challenge. In particular, purposes may be presupposed and framed only implicitly. To some extent, they may also be linked to other content areas within L1 education.

³ All quotations from the respective curricula have been translated into English by the authors, except for the quotations from the Swedish curriculum, where the English translation published by the Swedish National Agency for Education (2018) is used. However, quotations from the supplement to the Swedish curriculum have been translated by the authors.

For example, formulations about text interpretation in general may implicitly include literary texts. There may also be cases where it is uncertain or an open question whether a formulation relates to literary texts and literature education.

The process of analysis used included three steps. In the first step, the research group collectively read the parts chosen for analysis from each of the four curricula to identify tendencies that initially seemed important from a cross-national perspective, that is, what similarities and differences were apparent. An additional purpose of this first step was to make the individual members of the research group better aware of the country-specific cultural models that they were familiar with in their capacity as L1 researchers situated in one of those countries, and to help them stand back and view their “own” cultural models from a distance. In the second step, each curriculum was subjected to a separate analysis, conducted individually by the member(s) from the country in question. This analysis aimed to capture not only explicit statements in the curricula about the position assigned to literary texts and the purposes assigned to literature education, but also more implicit linguistic means of giving significance, such as syntactic foregrounding or comments about the purpose of work on texts in general (the first step of the analysis had suggested that all four curricula included examples across the scale from explicit to implicit). Finally, in the third step, the research group collectively compared the findings from each country and discussed the most significant tendencies from a cross-national perspective, thoroughly identifying both similarities and differences between the four L1 curricula with respect to the two research questions. We are fully aware that this fairly elaborate analytical model is no guarantee that our interpretative findings are not influenced to some extent by the baggage of implicit and explicit cultural models, some of them country-specific, carried by the research group as a whole and by its individual members. After all, as noted above, cultural models are ubiquitous. However, the collective process was designed with a view to minimising bias.

6. LITERATURE IN THE NORDIC L1 CURRICULA

The findings from the analysis of the curriculum documents are presented below, separately for the individual countries. Each section starts with a brief contextualisation and description of the document. Then the findings are presented in accordance with the research questions: (1) How are literary texts given significance compared with other texts in the four curricula? and (2) What purposes of literature education are given significance in the four curricula?

6.1 *Denmark*

Compulsory education in Denmark comprises the first ten years of school (years 0–9). The first year (year 0, age 6) is a transitory year between preschool and school; it has its own national curriculum. Primary and lower-secondary school are followed by a voluntary year 10. The overarching curriculum for primary and lower-secondary

school adopted in 2014 is now entitled Common Standards; it is the first national curriculum in Denmark to be based on key competencies for each school subject.

This overarching curriculum consists of a section on the general purpose of basic education as well as separate curricula for each school subject, including descriptions of three cross-disciplinary content areas: “IT and media”, “Language development” and “Innovation and entrepreneurship”. Following a revision process in 2019, the title Common Standards is now confined to a section on standards in each subject curriculum; the key content areas and related competence aims as well as content and skills objectives for each school subject are supplemented by a Reading Plan and Teaching Guidelines, both of which are descriptive and inspirational but not prescriptive in the legal sense. Together with a literary canon, these are the component parts of the national L1 curriculum (entitled *Dansk Faghæfte*, 2019) (Ministry of Children and Education [MCE], 2019).

The national L1 curriculum is based on four key content areas: “Reading”, “Production”, “Interpretation” and “Communication”, where the area of Interpretation specifically addresses work on “literature and other texts enabling aesthetic reading” (MCE, 2019). For each key content area, competence aims are specified for four stages: years 1–2, years 3–4, years 5–6 and years 7–9. Each competence aim is further divided into sets of knowledge and skills objectives. However, only the competence aims are mandatory, in accordance with a decision adopted in 2018 after a public discussion about the above-mentioned curriculum development towards basing the national standards on explicit learning outcomes. That decision—which thus applies to the present national L1 curriculum dating from 2019—can be deemed to reflect the national government’s wish to reverse that development to some extent.

6.1.1 *Literary texts in the Danish national L1 curriculum*

Danish L1 at primary and lower-secondary school is conceptualised as a school subject concerned with texts, language and communication: the Reading Plan states that “[t]he core of the school subject of Danish is work on texts, language and communication” (MCE, 2019, p. 5). This wording marks a shift away from previous national Danish L1 curricula, which emphasised “literature and language” as the core content of that subject (Krogh & Penne, 2015). The Reading Plan goes on to emphasise the multimodal nature of texts in an initial section explicitly entitled “The Notion of Text”, and it also points out that work on texts includes students’ receptive and productive meaning-making processes.

However, despite this apparent shift from a literature-oriented school subject to a text-oriented one, literature is still ascribed a certain amount of primacy over other texts in the extended Danish L1 text lexicon. For example, in the description of the purpose of the subject, literary texts are mentioned before other texts, meaning that they are prioritised syntactically. The formulation “literature and other texts enabling aesthetic reading” is used in the first sentence of the description of the purpose

and then repeated throughout the curriculum, both in the section on key competencies and in the Reading Plan and Teaching Guidelines. Moreover, it is explicitly stated that the Interpretation key competence area “primarily” addresses literary texts. Further, another way in which literary texts are given significance in the Reading Plan is that its initial section on the notion of text sets out to describe three categories of texts, the one mentioned first being precisely “literature and other texts enabling aesthetic reading”. This category is described as consisting of texts which “provide perspectives on one’s own and others’ life worlds” (MCE, 2019, p. 32) and which may give their recipients access to unfamiliar perspectives on the world and hence teach them about the world, about others and about themselves. This should be contrasted with the description of one of the other two categories, non-fiction, which is said to “provide information about the world” (MCE, 2019, p. 32).

A number of specific genres are mentioned: novels, graphic novels, poems, short stories, short films, picture books, songs, dramas and computer games (MCE, 2019, p. 33). Despite the inclusion of more recent genres such as short films and computer games, this listing of “literature and other texts enabling aesthetic reading” may be seen to maintain a traditional highlighting of prose, poetry and drama. In addition, it is explicitly emphasised that the central textual choice in order to support the students’ development of interpretative competencies should be Danish and other Nordic children’s literature (MCE, 2019, p. 38). This strong position assigned to literary texts is further reinforced by the examples given in the Teaching Guidelines, which are all taken from fictional literature with writing as the dominant modality (one example is song lyrics), and even more by the inclusion of a literary canon encompassing 14 historical Danish literary authors (including Henrik Ibsen, who is today regarded as a Norwegian author). The canon is prescriptive in the sense that all students are to read one text by each of the 14 authors as part of compulsory-school Danish L1 and general (academic) upper-secondary Danish L1. To conclude, it can be said that an orientation towards a broadening of the L1 text lexicon, and the associated reformulation of Danish L1 as an above all text-oriented school subject, exist in parallel with a clearly prioritised position ascribed to literary texts.

6.1.2 Purposes of literature education in the Danish national L1 curriculum

This prioritised position of literary texts may also be linked to the purposes of compulsory-school Danish L1 in general. The first purpose mentioned relates to personal growth, more specifically to the formation of a “personal and cultural identity”. It is stated that Danish L1 should enhance students’ “experience with and understanding of literature and other texts enabling aesthetic reading, non-fiction texts, language and communication as sources for the formation of personal and cultural identity” (MCE, 2019, p. 7). Later on, in the Reading Plan, it is further explained that a good choice of text enabling aesthetic reading is a text which is complex, intense and relevant to the students and their lives, that is, a text which can contribute to the development of the students’ personal and cultural identity (MCE, 2019, p. 38). Besides

this identity-formation purpose of compulsory-school Danish L1, and the particular emphasis placed on literary texts in this context, two other purposes of literature education are explicitly given significance.

One of those purposes relates to students' engagement with new perspectives in literary texts, and hence to their opportunities to obtain an expanded and deepened understanding of the world, other people and themselves—meaning that this purpose is interwoven with the identity-formation one. Further, engagement with unfamiliar voices and perspectives is also said to be able to contribute to students' development of empathy and to their understanding of "other cultures and ways of seeing the world" (MCE, p. 38). Here it should be added that there is no detailed description of what the notion of culture includes, meaning that it is unclear whether culture is mainly seen as solid (for example, related to nationality) or as fluid. It is also worth noting, in line with Kristjánsdóttir (2018, in press), that explicit reference is made only to *other cultures*—not to the students' own culture(s)—and this may reflect an implicit understanding of culture in present-day Danish society as something given. Even so, at a general level, this purpose related to the ability of literature (and other texts enabling aesthetic reading) to provide new perspectives may be linked to Nussbaum's (1997, 2010) idea of the role played by literature education in the formation of democratic citizens and in the development of the ability to understand and take into consideration perspectives other than one's own.

Finally, the last purpose of literature education given significance in the Danish curriculum is linked to an approach where literary texts are seen as open to interpretation. Discussion in the classroom of literature and other texts enabling aesthetic reading is mentioned as part of the competence aims for years 7–9 for the Interpretation key competence area and further highlighted in the skills objectives, for example using this wording: "the student is able to discuss different interpretations" (MCE, 2019, p. 17). This emphasis on the ambiguity of texts, and consequently on student engagement with different perspectives that can be taken on a text, may be linked to another variant of the idea that literature education has a part to play in the formation of democratic citizens, reflected in a goal of promoting participation in dissensus (Persson, 2007; Rancière, 1999). Additionally, it is worth noting that being able to discuss interpretations implies being able to use acquired text-analytical skills systematically, for example to identify themes, genres and literary language devices (MCE, 2019, p. 10–11).

To sum up, three partly interwoven purposes are ascribed to literature education: the formation of students' identity, the expansion and deepening of students' understanding of cultures and ways of seeing the world (and of seeing themselves) and the formation of good democratic citizens (relying on further development of empathy and resources required to participate in discussions). Hence those purposes involve a prioritisation of complex and ambiguous literary texts as well as a prioritisation of the development of disciplinary literacy (ways of exploring texts and discussing interpretations).

6.2 Finland

The Finnish core curriculum for compulsory education was revised in 2014 and the revised version was implemented in 2016. Compulsory education covers years 1–9. There are separate curricula for pre-primary education, general upper-secondary education and vocational upper-secondary education. The 2014 National Core Curriculum for Basic Education (Finnish National Board of Education [FNBE], 2014) includes twelve different national L1 curricula for the various mother tongues taught at Finnish schools, but the official languages, Finnish and Swedish, are by far the most common ones. The present paper focuses on the national L1 curriculum for Swedish language and literature. However, that curriculum is equivalent to that for Finnish language and literature in terms of its scope, objectives and content, “although with some minor differences due to certain linguistic and cultural characteristics” (FNBE, 2014, p. 289).

The national L1 curriculum for Swedish language and literature begins with a section entitled “Language Education” which describes the views on language pedagogy and language development on which the subject is based. This is followed by sections describing the specific tasks of the subject as well as objectives related to learning environments, differentiation and assessment. The national L1 curriculum for Swedish language and literature for years 7–9 is divided into four key content areas: Acting in interactive situations; Interpreting texts; Producing texts; and Understanding language, literature, and culture, with associated objectives for instruction and key content areas as well as knowledge and skills requirements. Specific content and skills objectives are formulated for years 1–2, 3–6 and 7–9, and knowledge requirements are set out for the end of years 6 and 9. In addition, instruction in the L1 subject, including the four content areas, is linked to a set of transversal competencies, such as cultural competence, multiliteracy, ICT competence, entrepreneurship and building a sustainable future.

6.2.1 *Literary texts in the Finnish national L1 curriculum*

It is explicitly stated that instruction should be “based on a broad definition of text” (FNBE, 2014, p. 287) and, more concretely, that “students will develop their interpretive skills by reading, analysing and interpreting various forms of fiction and non-fiction: literary and non-fiction texts in printed, electronic and audiovisual forms” (FNBE, 2014, p. 291). The overarching term text is referred to in several objectives for instruction and knowledge requirements, including in the definition of the kinds of texts that are to be used as well as in relation to metacognitive skills and to the development of analytical, interpretive and critical-reading competencies.

Despite the broad definition of text, however, literature is mentioned as a central type of text and also given a certain amount of syntactical priority throughout the national L1 curriculum. This is noticeable in formulations such as “students will be given various opportunities to analyse and interpret different kinds of literary, non-

fiction and media texts” (FNBE, 2014, p. 290). Further, besides being a central type of text, literature is explicitly mentioned as a core content area within instruction in the subject: “The instruction will familiarise students with a wide range of cultural contents, of which ‘literary art’, the media, drama and theatre as well as speech and communication culture are of key importance” (FNBE, 2014, p. 288). Instruction in what is rendered as “literary art” will “include the writing, reading and interpretation of literature” (FNBE, 2014, p. 288), meaning that this is a broader concept also encompassing literary production. Hence literature is described both as text and as a form of culture. In addition, literature is explicitly mentioned in connection not only with the interpretation but also with the production of text—as the object of both a receptive process and a productive process. The term “literature” appears mostly to refer to written literary texts since it is distinguished from other fiction texts, as in the expression “fiction texts and literary texts” (FNBE, 2014, p. 290), but it is closely connected to fiction in a broader sense in that it refers to fiction in different formats and media.

Consequently, literature—both as in literary art and as in literary texts—is given significance by having a certain prioritised position in the national L1 curriculum as one of the core content areas and as a central type of text. However, in the analysis of how literature is given significance, it is relevant to note that literature is in fact not mentioned explicitly in the introductory section of the curriculum, which focuses on language awareness and language competence. Further, that section is followed by a description of the language pedagogy underpinning the curriculum, and literature is not mentioned there either—and nor is there a corresponding section elsewhere dealing with literature pedagogy. What is more, there are explicit formulations in the national L1 curriculum for years 7–9 that emphasise non-fiction texts: “In years 7–9, the specific task of instruction will be to support the students in developing increasingly versatile learning and communication skills as well as broader multi-literacy. [...] Attention will be paid to the language and interaction skills needed in further studies and working life” (FNBE, 2014, p. 288). In fact, those formulations to some extent challenge the position of literature in the L1 subject at lower-secondary school.

6.2.2 *Purposes of literature education in the Finnish national L1 curriculum*

The subject of Swedish language and literature is conceptualised as a subject aiming to develop students’ literacy, language proficiency and interaction skills, as well as to guide them towards developing an interest in language, literature and other forms of culture. The focus of instruction is on developing students’ linguistic and cultural skills in multimedia communication environments in order to promote their development into active and participative citizens who can motivate their views and influence their own lives and the surrounding community using various means of communication.

Several purposes for literature reading and literature instruction are described in the national L1 curriculum, some more explicitly than others. The explicitly stated purposes of reading literature are that literature strengthens the versatile development of creativity and imagination, expands students' understanding of their potential for linguistic expression, connects them to their own culture and broadens their perception of other cultures. When it comes to the explicitly stated purposes of literature instruction, there is a focus on encouraging students to read and to obtain and share experiences, on deepening students' cultural knowledge, on supporting their ethical growth and on enriching their language and imagination. Further, literature instruction is said to aim at developing students' skills in literary analysis and interpretation, at familiarising them with the history of literature, modern literature and different literary genres, and at helping them consider the meaning of literature in their own lives. The purposes relating to imagination and cultural awareness include features of Nussbaum's (2010) description of narrative imagination and coincide with her idea of the formative potential of literature when it comes to fostering democratic citizenship. However, another special focus for instruction is on supporting students' reading experiences and simply on reading per se, as reflected in formulations such as "in the teaching and learning of literature, students will be encouraged to seek diverse reading experiences" (FNBE, 2014, p. 290) and "students will be encouraged to read literature, to expand their reading pursuits and to gather reading experiences" (FNBE, 2014, p. 288).

The purposes of literature education which are ascribed significance are thus related to reading experiences, ethical growth and cultural awareness as well as to analytical reading skills, linguistic expression and knowledge of literary genres and literary history. Earlier studies of Finnish curricula (e.g. Rejman, 2013) show that such purposes were prevalent in the past as well. Hence the Finnish national L1 curriculum for Swedish language and literature reflects a combination of what Kaspersen (2012) refers to as a text-based position and a reader-based position.

To sum up, the explicit purposes of literature reading and instruction point towards a literature education aiming to develop both literature-specific and general reading skills and competences. Further, those purposes point towards a literature education aiming to develop knowledge of literature as an art form as well as to promote cultural knowledge, imagination and personal growth. Compared with earlier curricula, there is one remarkable shift when it comes to the purposes of literature instruction, namely the focus on promoting reading interest and reading experiences. This new focus is reflected both in the explicit overarching purposes of literature instruction and in several specific objectives for literature instruction, where the development of reading interest and variety of reading matter are emphasised by means of formulations such as "encourage students to expand their interest in fictional literary and text genres that are new to them and to diversify their reading" (FNBE, 2014, p. 290). This focus on promoting reading interest and reading experi-

ence in fact permeates the national L1 curriculum for Swedish language and literature, meaning that this purpose takes on considerable significance compared with the others.

6.3 Norway

The overarching Norwegian national curriculum, the Knowledge Promotion Reform (2006), covers education from year 1 to year 13, that is, until the end of upper-secondary school (students aged 6–18 years). Years 1–10, including the three years of lower-secondary school (years 8–10), are compulsory. The Norwegian national curriculum has recently been revised and the changes made will be implemented gradually from 2020. The revised overarching curriculum consists of a core curriculum (Ministry of Education and Research, 2017) and subject-specific curricula (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training [NDE], 2019). The L1 curriculum consists of three main parts. The first part, entitled “About the subject”, includes descriptions of the subject’s relevance and central values; six core elements (Text in context; Critical approaches to text; Oral communication; Written text production; Language as a system and an opportunity; and Linguistic diversity); three interdisciplinary themes (Public health and life skills; Democracy and citizenship; and Sustainable development); and four basic skills (oral skills; writing; reading; and digital skills). The second part, entitled “Competence aims and assessment”, includes competence aims and descriptions of both formative and summative assessment. The third part describes the “Assessment system”. When it comes specifically to lower-secondary school, the second part of the L1 curriculum includes a single description which is common to years 8–10. This means that the list of competence aims describes objectives for the students’ competence at the end of lower-secondary school. That list includes sixteen aims, all of which are rather open to interpretation.

In this study, the national Norwegian L1 curriculum constitutes the main object of analysis. More precisely, the first part of that curriculum and the competence aims and assessment descriptions in its second part are examined in detail. However, the core curriculum and the remaining parts of the L1 curriculum constitute an important contextual framework for the interpretation of the parts examined more closely.

6.3.1 *Literary texts in the Norwegian national L1 curriculum*

In line with the understanding of the Knowledge Promotion Reform as a literacy reform (Berge, 2005), the revised L1 curriculum uses an extended text notion, explicitly referred to in the core element of “Text in context” and explained as follows: “This means that students will read and experience texts that combine different expressions” (NDE, 2019, p. 2). The general concept of “text” is used in several of the competence aims to be attained after year 10: once in an aim focusing on comprehension of other Scandinavian languages in written and oral texts, once in a thematically driven aim focusing on adolescents’ life situation, and finally in an aim relating to the

use of discipline-specific language and knowledge about grammar, text structure and genre. In addition, the concept of text is implicitly present in an aim focusing on the ability to recognise and make use of linguistic devices.

Alongside the overarching concept of “text”, those of “literature” and “non-fiction” appear as an established “textual dyad” in two competence aims. The first of those is a quite open and broad competence aim focusing both on variation in language, on cultural and national origin and on reading objectives, where it is stated that students should “read literary texts and non-fiction written in Bokmål and Nynorsk [the two variants of the Norwegian language] or translated from Sami and other languages, and reflect upon the aspects of purpose, content, genre conventions and linguistic devices” (NDE, 2019, p. 7). In the second of those aims, which is metacognitively inspired, it is stated that students should “describe and reflect upon their own use of reading strategies when reading literature and non-fiction” (NDE, 2019, p. 7). Finally, the specific literary genres of novels, short stories and poetry are explicitly mentioned—followed by the non-specific wording “and other texts”—in one of the aims, which focuses on interpretation and comparison in the light of historical and contemporary contexts (NDE, 2019, p. 7).

To sum up, literary texts are clearly given significance in the Norwegian national L1 curriculum as they are both included in the extended notion of “text” and included as texts which occupy a particular place in the L1 subject. However, in line with the openness of the competence aims set out in the curriculum, teachers are given considerable freedom of choice when it comes to the specific texts used in instruction—although they must ensure that the selection of texts offered to students is varied in nature.

6.3.2 Purposes of literature education in the Norwegian national L1 curriculum

The Norwegian L1 curriculum includes references to a wide range of purposes of reading literature. Some of them are explicitly stated while others are indirectly acknowledged through descriptions of intended student outcomes. The most explicit references to purposes of reading literature are to be found in the first part of the curriculum. The paragraph describing the subject’s relevance and central values states that the subject is to “give students literary experiences” and that the “[r]eading of literature and non-fiction is to provide students with opportunities to reflect on core values and moral questions and help them gain respect for human dignity and for nature” (NDE, p. 2). In addition, the paragraph entitled “Text in context” includes the following wording: “Students will read texts in order to experience, be engaged, be amazed, learn and obtain insight into other people’s thoughts and conditions of life” (NDE, p. 2). Several of the purposes of reading literature discussed in the Background and Context section above are reflected in these descriptions. They point clearly both towards the reader-response tradition (e.g. Rosenblatt, 1978) and towards the promotion of democracy (Nussbaum, 1997, 2010). However, this also opens up for different interpretations. For instance, we might understand

what is referred to as “experiencing” and “literary experiences” in many ways. We may link it to motivation, thus understanding it both as supporting literacy development in general and as a precondition for the purposes mentioned after it. Another possibility is to understand it as involving a call for aesthetic experiences. Both interpretations actually seem to find support in the competence aims and in the section on formative assessment after year 10, where it is stated that the teacher will “facilitate students’ development of endurance in reading” and “stimulate their desire to learn by allowing them to use their imagination” (NDE, 2019, p. 7).

The above-mentioned formulation found in relation to the core element of “Text in context” provides some guidance on how to interpret the two most prominent and wide-reaching of the competence aims to be achieved after year 10 when it comes to the reading of literature. Those two aims are, first, to “read literary texts and non-fiction written in Bokmål and Nynorsk or translated from Sami and other languages, and reflect upon the aspects of purpose, content, genre conventions and linguistic devices” and, second, to “compare and interpret novels, short stories, poems and other texts in the light of their historical context and the students’ present time”. Those aims call for readings rooted in a wide range of subject-specific knowledge—for instance, knowledge of literary genres, of the history of literature and of linguistic devices. In order to fulfil these aims, students will also need to be familiar with some methodological approaches to the analysis and interpretation of literary texts. What is more, the second aim—especially considering that it appears alongside a more thematically formulated aim for students to “explore and reflect upon how texts present adolescents’ life situations”—clearly activates a purpose of obtaining insight into other peoples’ lives, developing empathy and exploring cultures and identities across temporal borders.

The purposes of the L1 subject foregrounded in the curriculum’s three interdisciplinary themes further support the above interpretations: insight into other people’s circumstances of life and their challenges is singled out—alongside support for and challenges to the students’ self-conceptions through reading—as a way to support the students’ identity development, life skills, tolerance, respect for other people’s perspectives and understanding of opposing and conflicting interests.

To sum up, although there are several possible interpretations of the explicit purposes of reading stated in the Norwegian curriculum, at an overall level the list of purposes would appear to call for a literature education where the reading of literature is seen as a way to enhance the development of general and discipline-specific literacy and to develop empathy and an understanding of other people’s and other cultures’ perspectives. Hence the Norwegian L1 national curriculum seems to reflect both the focus on the development of disciplinary literacy which is generally promoted in a Nordic context (e.g. Gourvennec, 2017; Kabel, 2016; Skiftun, 2009) and a combination of a text-based position and a reader-oriented one (Kaspersen, 2012).

6.4 Sweden

The Swedish national curriculum for compulsory school covers years 1–9. It consists of general descriptions and instructions as well as curricula (“syllabuses”⁴) for each subject. First implemented in 2011, it has been revised several times. In 2017, the subject of Swedish L1 was subject to a revision. Several subjects, including Swedish L1, are currently again undergoing revision, and the new curriculum will be implemented in 2020. In this study, the revised version (from 2018) of the 2011 curriculum and its supplement (*Kommentarmaterial*) form the basis of the analysis. The supplement is intended to help teachers understand and interpret the curriculum proper. This makes it an important source when it comes to understanding the intentions of the policy-makers, which explains why it is used here.

The curriculum begins with a general description of the subject’s aims, which are the same throughout compulsory school. The detailed description of the aims is summarised in a concluding bullet list of five bullets describing what the teaching should help the students achieve. The subsequent sections, which are oriented towards different stages (years 1–3, 4–6 and 7–9, respectively), specify the core content of the subject. For each stage, the core content is divided into five sub-sections reflecting the five key content areas of Reading and writing; Speaking, listening and talking; Narrative texts and non-fiction texts; Use of language; and Searching for information and critical evaluation of sources. The final section presents knowledge requirements for each stage (that is, after years 3, 6 and 9). Students in years 6–9 are graded on a scale from F (fail) to A (excellent).

6.4.1 Literary texts in the Swedish national L1 curriculum

In the introduction to the curriculum, it is stated in three sentences that language is the focus of the L1 subject. In those three sentences, the word “language” appears four times, and the central position of the concept is further underscored by a discussion of why knowledge of language is so important. The supplement also stresses that language and communication represent the core content of the subject. However, it additionally states that knowing a language means mastering it, in order to partake of literature, film and theatre (Swedish National Agency for Education [SNAE], 2017, p. 5). Literary texts are highlighted in the third paragraph of the introduction to the curriculum, where it is stated that students should encounter literary texts and gain knowledge about them. As mentioned above, the aims of Swedish L1 are summarised in a concluding bullet list, where literary texts are mentioned once: “read and analyse literature and other texts for different purposes”. Here it is worth

⁴ In the official translation, a distinction is made between the (overall) curriculum and the (subject-specific) syllabuses. The document analysed in this study is the “syllabus” for Swedish L1, which is part of the “curriculum”. However, in the remainder of the paper this is referred to as a “curriculum” to ensure alignment with the other national contexts.

noting that literary texts are syntactically and semantically foregrounded by the wording “literature and other texts” (*italics ours*). This can be seen as a way to stress the importance of the literary text. The supplement also emphasises the importance of literature and literary texts in the L1 subject (SNAE, 2017, p. 7), but it should be pointed out that several text types are given significance in the Swedish curriculum. Alongside literary texts, mention is also made of non-fiction texts and multimodal texts (television series, theatrical performances and web texts). The stated aim of the work on different types of texts, including literary texts, is to give students “the opportunity to develop their language, their own identity and their understanding of the surrounding world” (SNAE, 2018, p. 262). The position of literary texts relative to that of other texts is rather ambiguous. On the one hand, the use of literary texts is framed as being associated with language development. On the other hand, the curriculum does mention a number of aspects of literary texts that should be dealt with in the classroom, which it does not do for any other types of texts. Specifically, “[l]anguage features, structure and narrative perspectives” as well as “parallel action, flashbacks, descriptions of settings and persons, internal and external dialogues” (SNAE, 2018, p. 267) are mentioned as an important part of the work on literary texts. First, this means that the teacher will have to choose literary texts that can be used to illustrate those aspects, which implies the use of literary texts of a certain complexity. Second, the fact that such specific aspects are not mentioned in relation to any other text type can be seen to emphasise the special position of the literary text—or at least to emphasise the qualitative difference between literary and other texts.

It is stated in the supplement that the aim is to deepen and broaden the students’ knowledge of text structures, their purpose and their use. From this perspective, the literary text has quite a strong position, and it is given significance by being a particular type of text that requires the use of particular tools. From another perspective, it is important to notice that the literary text is not foregrounded in the knowledge requirements, which are of great importance for how the curriculum is interpreted. To sum up, literary texts are given significance in the Swedish curriculum as texts among other texts to be used as a tool to develop students’ language and communication skills, but they are also given a particular position by being ascribed a number of unique qualities.

6.4.2 *Purposes of literature education in the Swedish L1 curriculum*

Several purposes for reading literary texts at Swedish lower-secondary school are set out in the curriculum. Not all of them are explicit, but some of them are specified in the supplement, which includes some discussion about how texts should be dealt with in the classroom. As already stated, the role of the literary text is somewhat ambiguous, since language development is the main goal (indeed, one explicit purpose of reading literary texts is for students to develop their language through reading) but one of the reasons given for developing language is to be able to read and

understand literary texts. This could be seen as a kind of circular definition where, at the end of the day, language development seems to be the most important issue. In the supplement, however, it is said that one purpose of reading literary texts at school is to help students discover the joy of reading and explore different times and places through literature. The supplement also contains an almost poetic section about the literary text which says that literature can become a source of comfort and support, bringing answers to questions about life and the surrounding world. It even states that literature can contribute knowledge that cannot be obtained from any other source. Students, it is pointed out, should use literary texts to discuss existential issues, and this should promote the development of their language, their identity and their understanding of the surrounding world (SNAE, 2018, p. 7). These ideas can be linked to earlier Swedish research into how Swedish students react to a literary text, in which it was found to be quite common for students to relate what they have read to their own experience (see e.g. Johansson, 2015; Thorson 2009; Torell 2002). The literary text is thus ascribed a number of qualities, and the curriculum (particularly its supplement) reflects high expectations when it comes to what a literary text is able to do.

However, those formulations about the effects of literature and reading can come across as incompatible with other formulations relating to literary analysis. It is stated in the curriculum that structural aspects of literary texts should be dealt with in the classroom, and this indicates that one purpose of reading literature is to learn how to analyse, understand and interpret literary texts. As noted above, this could mean that the literary text is given quite a strong position, but it also has to be understood in the light of other passages in the curriculum. After all, the main stated purpose of reading literary texts at school is to give students the opportunity to understand themselves and the surrounding world through those texts. In the case of texts from other cultures, an additional aim is to increase students' understanding of other people's conditions. One way to further narrow down the purpose of literary texts as expressed in the curriculum is to take a closer look at what is to be assessed. Knowledge requirements are an important part of the curriculum and indirectly reflect the underlying intentions. It turns out that the knowledge requirements do not explicitly call for analysis of literary texts even though this is implied by the content descriptions. Earlier analyses of the present curriculum (Lundström et al., 2011) have interpreted its passages about literary analysis as reflecting a shift towards making the L1 subject more measurable. However, the interpretative guidance provided in the supplement argues against such a reading, given that it emphasises other aspects of the subject, and so do the knowledge requirements, where nothing is said about the various aspects of the literary text mentioned in the other sections of the curriculum.

In fact, the literary text is explicitly mentioned only once in the knowledge requirements, whose first sentence reads as follows: "[Students] can read fiction and non-fiction texts with ease by using and choosing reading strategies based on the

specific characteristics of the text [...]”⁵ (SNAE, 2018, pp. 272–273). In addition, mention is made in the knowledge requirements of “different texts” and “different works”, which must be assumed to include literary texts. Further, the mention of, first, the “message” and “creator” of a work and, second, its “cultural and historical context” also implies that the text referred to may be of a literary nature, especially when the overall curriculum is taken into consideration. For the “E” grade, it is enough for students to be able to “reason” about the main message, but to obtain higher grades, students have to be able to find both explicit and implicit messages in a text. (Incidentally, this implies that there are always messages in texts.) This means that what is to be assessed is not how well a student can identify certain aspects of a narrative text, such as parallel action or external and internal dialogue, but what reading strategies the student uses and how well he or she is able to understand the context of the text and the conditions in which it was produced. This discrepancy between the description of the subject and the knowledge requirements adds to the ambiguity of the position of the literary text in the Swedish curriculum.

To sum up, literary texts have a somewhat ambiguous position in the Swedish L1 subject. They are given significance by the claim that they play an important role in the students’ language development but they are also described as playing an important role in the students’ personal growth and in their understanding of the surrounding world. In this sense, literary texts are not given significance by reference to their intrinsic value. Still, as we have seen above, the literary text is treated differently from other types of texts, and it is stated that structural aspects of such texts should be dealt with in the classroom, which implies some recognition of their intrinsic value. Both experience-based and analytical approaches (Rødnes 2014) are highlighted in the Swedish curriculum—but only the former are explicitly recognised in the knowledge requirements.

7. CULTURAL MODELS OF LITERATURE AND LITERATURE EDUCATION

Aiming to shed light on the cultural models of literature and literature education reflected in the Danish, Finnish, Norwegian and Swedish national L1 curricula for lower-secondary school, we investigated how literature is given discursive significance in those curricula. In order to gain knowledge about cultural models, we specifically analysed how literary texts are given significance in comparison with other texts and what purposes of literature education are given significance in the four L1 curricula. We identified both similarities and differences across the countries (see Table 2).

⁵ “With ease” is the requirement for the “E” grade, the lowest passing grade; the corresponding wording for a “C” is “with good ease” and that for an “A” is “with very good ease”).

Table 2. Overview of findings for each country.

	Denmark	Finland	Norway	Sweden
How literary texts are given significance	Strong significance ascribed to literary texts, reinforced by examples given in the Teaching Guidelines as well as the inclusion of a literary canon.	Given a prioritised position by being a central type of text and by representing a core content area. Included in the extended notion of text.	Included as a text type occupying a particular place in the L1 subject through syntactic foregrounding and emphasis on particular literary genres.	Included as a text type occupying a particular place in the L1 subject by being a core content area and by being identified as a central type of text with specific characteristics.
	Emphasis on complex and ambiguous literary texts which are relevant to students. Broadening of the L1 text lexicon, Danish as a text-oriented school subject.	Position relative to non-fiction texts somewhat challenged, given the focus on language awareness and language competence.	Explicitly and implicitly included in an extended notion of text.	Ascribed unique qualities.
Purposes of literature education that are given significance	Personal growth/formation of personal and cultural identity. Developing an understanding of other people and other ways of seeing the world. Formation of democratic citizens (development of empathy and resources for participating in discussions).	Enhancing reading interest and reading experience. Developing both literature-specific and general reading skills and competences. Developing knowledge of literature as an art form. Promoting cultural knowledge and personal growth.	Enhancing the development of general and discipline-specific literacy. Developing empathy and an understanding of the perspectives of other people and other cultures.	Language development through literary analysis. Personal growth. Developing an understanding of the surrounding world.

When it comes to how literary texts are given significance compared with other texts, a key finding is that all four national L1 curricula explicitly and implicitly give literary texts significance as texts. Literature is generally part of an extended notion of “text” perceived as anything that can be “read” (or “written”), such as street signs,

buildings, computer games, novels, manuals, pictures, articles, commercials, short stories, and so forth. This understanding of text is deeply rooted in socio-cultural and socio-semiotic perspectives, where a text is always considered contextually dependent. However, as demonstrated in our analyses, literature is also explicitly and specifically mentioned and syntactically prioritised in all four curricula—and thus ascribed a prominent position, although that position varies to some extent between the countries. Whereas there is no doubt that literary texts are included generally in all four curricula and specifically in the Danish literary canon, teachers are still left with a substantial amount of freedom when it comes to deciding what literary texts can be used in the L1 classroom and to what extent literary texts will be used there.

Importantly, though, and related to this choice of literary texts by teachers, our analysis shows that the four curricula differ profoundly in how they address questions of the origin of literary texts, ranging from an explicit comment in the Norwegian and Swedish curricula on the importance of reading literature from various parts of the world to an implicit norm emphasising national literary texts and the establishment of reading lists of national and Scandinavian authorships in the Danish curriculum. These differences between the four curricula studied when it comes to the question of national culture and identity—or the relative prominence of different languages and literatures in the L1 school subject—clearly show that the question about the role of literature education in a globalised world is answered in different ways.

The doubleness of ascribing literature a position as a component of an extended concept of “text” while at the same time giving literary texts a prioritised position in their own right is present in all four curricula, and this clearly opens up for interpretation. One way of interpreting this doubleness is to conclude that when “literature” is explicitly mentioned, it is made more significant compared with other types of texts. Considering the discursive displacement of “literature”, it could even be argued that literature is given significance in that it is perceived as something different from any other texts. This prioritised position of literary texts can be interpreted as a way of emphasising the importance of teaching literature in Nordic L1 education—including, in the cases of Denmark and Finland, with regard to students’ own production—and the discursive displacement makes it possible to interpret literature as providing something more valuable than other texts do. This yields two competing cultural models of literature: one that defines *literature as exceptional texts with the potential to provide something that other texts cannot*, and one that defines *literature as texts like any other texts with no particular potential compared with other types of texts*.

When it comes to the question regarding the purposes of literature education that are given significance, there is diversity in terms of the purposes emphasised, both within each of the four curricula and across the countries, but there are also several similarities. For instance, according to all four curricula, the reading of literary texts is related to identity formation: literature is perceived as contributing to stu-

dents' personal growth. Further, all four curricula emphasise positive reading experiences as a purpose of reading literature. In the Norwegian and Finnish curricula, this is expressed as reading for experience, whereas in the Swedish supplement, literature is described as "a source of comfort and support". These formulations reflect a notion of literature as something different from other types of texts, and they seem to be underpinned by a strong belief in the potential of the literary text to influence its reader's life. In the Danish curriculum, this purpose is expressed as "personal and cultural development of identity, empathy and democracy". Adding to the Danish specification, the Finnish curriculum also includes "cultural knowledge", the Norwegian one mentions "engagement, questioning and insight", and the Swedish one refers to the development of the students' identity and their understanding of the surrounding world. In this context, one important difference between the Finnish and Swedish curricula, on the one hand, and the Danish and Norwegian ones, on the other, is the strong emphasis placed by the former on motivation for reading and interest in reading as means to enhance language skills.

Based on this wide range of purposes for literature education, we may identify several cultural models: a) literature education is good for the development of the self or for the individual's own growth; b) literature education enhances literacy skills and disciplinary knowledge; c) literature education supports the development of empathy; and d) literature education is good for expanding knowledge about cultures. Each of these cultural models in fact constitutes a link in a chain—or overarching cultural model—according to which *literature is a means to maintain and improve democratic society through the moulding and development of good citizens*.

These cultural models of literature and literature education identified in the Nordic L1 curricula can be related to broader trends. The double position of literary texts reflected in all four Nordic L1 curricula may be related to a broader international trend towards a focus on literacy ("New Literacy Studies") in L1 education (Krogh & Penne, 2015; Ongstad, 2018). Further, the cultural model of literature as texts like any other texts may be interpreted as reflecting a shift towards stressing key competencies (see e.g. OECD, 2005). Against this background, it could be argued that literary texts may have lost some of their status in the L1 subjects. However, as our findings also show, literary texts are still given significance and prominence compared with other text types in the L1 curricula.

What is more, the literacy trend identified may go beyond a focus on more fundamental aspects of literacy and also manifest itself as a stronger focus on disciplinary literacy practices in the literature classroom, such as ways of analysing and interpreting literary texts. Such a stronger focus may also be linked to different local and/or national trends within a reader-oriented pedagogy, ranging from an emphasis on the importance of different interpretations of—or perspectives on—literary texts in Danish literature classrooms to an emphasis on the literary reading experience as a goal in and of itself in Finland and—to some extent—in Sweden.

Alongside this long-standing cultural model of literary texts as exceptional texts, however, the overarching model of literature education as a means to maintain and improve democratic society through the moulding and development of good citizens also appears to be a robust cross-national model with a good ability to survive changes in educational policy and withstand the forces of pedagogical, technological and other, broader, currents in society.

8. CONCLUDING REMARKS

The present study is bound to the time of the analysis of the four Nordic L1 national curricula, which are in a process of constant revision. In this paper, we only briefly discuss historical developments in each country and do not reflect on current tendencies in the light of each country's L1 history. However, notwithstanding these limitations, our cross-national perspective enables us to identify and illustrate prevailing cultural models of Nordic L1 literature education.

Our analysis of Nordic curricula has identified traces of high expectations being placed on literature education as a means to maintain and improve democratic society through the moulding and development of good citizens. Previous research (Persson, 2012) has criticised the view of literature as automatically able to create good citizens. It is indeed not particularly clear from the curricula how exactly work on literary texts is supposed to cause a transformation to the better in the reader. Given the presence of competing cultural models when it comes to the position of literary texts, the curricula are likely to leave teachers in a challenging interpretative position. How teachers handle that challenge will depend, among other things, on their epistemological position. However, faced with competing cultural models of a more or less implicit nature, teachers may well react by turning towards the more concrete and measurable aspects of the curriculum, focusing on knowledge seen as a fixed product. If this happens, the overarching cultural model relating to good democratic citizens could be superseded, in classroom practice, by a different model stressing the benefits of predetermined, measurable chunks of knowledge.

This risk that a cultural model may crumble under its own weight is only one reason why it is important to keep up conversations about the position of literature and the purposes of literature education, not only in the Nordic L1 subjects but also internationally, in L1 education in general. It must be ensured that literature teaching is not needlessly restricted to a single cultural model but can draw upon a mutual understanding and find inspiration across national borders. In that context, this study contributes to an informed research discussion about the different possible purposes—and thus values—of literature education. Assigning a prominent position to the twin questions of what values education is built on, and what values it should build on, is in fact distinctive of any democratic society, because—in the words of Gert Biesta (2007)—“[a] democratic society is precisely one in which the purpose of education is not given but is a constant topic for discussion and deliberation” (p. 18).

With this study, we hope to contribute to such a discussion about the position of literature and the purposes of literature education.

AUTHORS' NOTE

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