ENVISIONING HISTORY: SHAPING LITERACY PRACTICES IN THE TEACHING OF THE EARLY MODERN PERIOD IN GRADE 6

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Abstract
This article aims to contribute knowledge of how literacy practices are actively shaped in the teaching of history. One teacher and her two groups of Grade 6 students were followed during a content area spanning 12 weeks that focused on the Vasa era in Swedish history. The collected material consists of field notes, transcripts of peer group and whole-class interaction, samples of students' writing, and documented teaching material. Based on theoretical frameworks of literacy and classroom interaction, the analysis of the findings shows how the teacher, using resources such as texts, images, and one episode of a documentary series, facilitated the students' initial immersion in the historical period and supported their developed understanding. The teacher is shown to employ a dialogic communicative approach while also introducing more abstract and content-relevant perspectives. Although the teacher positioned the students to consider representations of key historical figures, opportunities to critically analyze texts as historical sources were limited. The implications for shaping literacy practices in ways which promote Grade 6 students' development of disciplinary literacy in history are discussed.

Keywords: literacy practices, history teaching, classroom discourse, primary education, disciplinary literacy

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1. INTRODUCTION

Learning and communicating content knowledge involve navigating different expectations of using language and participating in literacy practices. Thus, teachers are often asked to consciously organize students' opportunities for reading and writing in ways that support their engagement in the subject. This article highlights how literacy practices were actively shaped by a teacher in Grade 6 (12-year-old students), working in a school in a segregated area in southern Sweden with many second-language learners. While the language and literacy expectations of school history are described in earlier research (see the following section), more knowledge is needed regarding how teachers support relatively young learners in talking, thinking, and writing about history in ongoing teaching practice.

Therefore, the overall aim of this article is to contribute knowledge regarding how literacy practices are shaped by the participant teacher in the teaching of history. I focus on the ways in which texts and images were talked about in a Grade 6 history course about a part of the early modern period (the Vasa era) in Swedish history. The following questions are addressed:

- When talking about texts and pictures, how did the teacher position the students to engage with the content being taught?
- What characterized the way in which the teacher shaped the interaction as part of literacy practices?
- What priorities in teaching did the literacy practices reflect?

Because the study took place in Sweden, it is relevant to consider how the current national syllabus for the teaching of history—mirroring other subjects under the category of Social studies—carries expectations of students' "applying reasoning" and "using historical concepts" (Skolverket, 2019, p. 211). Such literacy expectations are toned down, but still evident in a not-yet-implemented revision of the syllabuses, generally marking a step towards a fact-learning approach.

It can be challenging to teach according to high literacy expectations in Grade 6, as the students need to talk, write, and think about history and historical processes in abstract ways that transcend commonsense perspectives and stretch their cognitive capabilities. Historical thinking requires the use of contextualization skills in locating historical events in their proper context and in examining texts with respect to author bias (e.g., Reisman & Wineburg, 2008; Samuelsson & Wendell, 2016; Shanahan & Shanahan, 2012; Wineburg & Reisman, 2015). The challenge of coping with the literacy demands of grade-level history teaching is especially significant for the substantial number of migrant language learners who have started attending Swedish schools in the last decade. Consequently, many schools—particularly those in segregated and socioeconomically disadvantaged areas—employ methods geared at scaffolding (cf. Woods et al. 1976) students' reading, writing, and reasoning about the content taught. Recognizing the importance of working consciously with reading development, regardless of grade or subject, the primary school in which this study was conducted emphasized students' involvement in text discussions based on

supporting material from the National Agency of Education (cf. Molloy, 2018; Skolverket, 2020a; Westlund, 2018). As referenced in the supporting material, a common ideal for teaching in Sweden is the concept of “the multivoiced classroom”, which builds on the internationally widespread ideals of dialogic teaching. This approach is a reaction to the teacher-centric model, instead emphasizing students’ opportunities to formulate their thoughts in speech and writing (cf. Dysthe, 1993; Mercer & Littleton, 2008; Nystrand, 1997).

Classroom research plays an important role in exploring the alignment of advocated methods with content-learning goals, highlighting teachers’ efforts to promote both first and second-language learners in developing subject-related literacies. The present study contributes to this research by exploring how literacy practices are shaped by the participant teacher in the teaching of history.

2. LITERACY PRACTICES AND LITERACY EXPECTATIONS IN SCHOOL HISTORY

Seminal research in disciplinary literacy has shown that engaging with history means paying close attention to the author or the source of a text in order to judge how history is represented (Shanahan & Shanahan, 2008; Shanahan et al., 2011). Fitzgerald (2019) noted that the teaching of history in the United States has shifted from the traditional textbook to the evaluation of authentic sources. Furthermore, research into teacher preparation and development has emphasized creating opportunities for the comparison of sources in history teaching (Howard & Guidry, 2017; Monte-Sano et al., 2014). Research based on systemic-functional linguistics (SFL) is central in this regard, as it has provided knowledge of the language of history as being characterized by abstraction and the use of linguistically defined genres. These range from simple, chronological accounts to explanations and discussions (e.g., Coffin, 1997; Fang, 2012; Martin & Rose, 2008).

In an analysis of the Swedish National Agency for Education’s syllabus for history in relation to Grade 6 students’ answers on national tests, Samuelsson and Wendell (2016) showed that expectations have moved from the reproduction of facts to analytical disciplinary thinking. Further studies have raised concerns about the implicit literacy expectations of students’ using genre structures and other language resources for argumentation and explanations (Molin & Grubbström, 2013; Staf & Nord, 2018; Staf, 2019). This echoes international concerns that teachers may be unprepared when supporting students’ disciplinary literacy in history (Monte-Sano & De La Paz, 2012; Schleppegrell et al., 2004; Veel & Coffin, 1996). Ethnographic classroom research focusing specifically on writing practices in the Nordic countries indicates that the potential for using writing as resource for learning history and other social studies subjects appears largely untapped, as writing has not been explicitly encouraged or modelled by the teachers. Instead, writing seems to be used mainly for the storing of knowledge in preparation for oral presentations or written tests (Lindh, 2019; Ohrem Bakke, 2019; Christensen et al., 2014; cf. Applebee & Langer, 2013; Monte-Sano & De La Paz, 2012).

While much previous research has been concerned with writing and other ways of manifesting knowledge, it is also important to consider what is needed to support students' disciplinary reading. Among the different interventions inspired by sociocultural theories, such as Reciprocal Teaching (Palincsar & Brown, 1984), Thinking Together (Mercer & Littleton, 2007), scaffolding strategies in second-language teaching (Hammond & Gibbons, 2005), and Reading to Learn (Rose & Martin, 2012), the common denominators are explicit and structured work with texts combined with rich opportunities to engage in dialogue. Offering open-ended activity structures including opportunities for peer interaction is often perceived as means of increasing the status of second-language learners (e.g., Cummins, 2000; Morais & Neves, 2001; Walldén, 2020b) while also promoting the joint negotiation of challenging texts. Regarding the reception of texts in history, a national study focusing on high school students found that second-language learners, lacking adequate support, resorted to insufficient commonsense readings of the text material (Olvegård, 2014). Two national studies investigating the implementation of Reading to Learn (Hallesson et al., 2018) and genre-based instruction (Sellgren, 2011) found that students were supported in achieving a disciplinary understanding. In contrast, a study of genre-based teaching by Walldén (2019a) showed that the scaffolding provided to the second-language learners—including both structured work with texts and rich opportunities for interaction—was not aligned with content-learning goals due to a lack of adequate texts. The present study will bring further attention to the implementation of advocated methods for teaching. A previous study based on the same material showed how the simplified text material used in instruction seemed to limit students' opportunities to use language in more abstract and subject-specific ways (Walldén, 2020a).

Rather than foregrounding the literacy expectations described in previous research, this study highlights the specific literacy practices actively shaped by the teacher throughout the course (see next section). This involves an exploration of the way in which the students were positioned to write, talk, and think about the texts and images presented to them. The Swedish history syllabus states that Grade 6 students should be able to display disciplinary skills such as examining contrasting sources and discussing how history is used for different purposes (cf. Skolverket, 2019, 2020b). Nevertheless, these literacy expectations are not actively imposed since national tests—the main control mechanism for equitable instruction and the assessment of knowledge in Sweden—have not been given in history and related subjects in Grade 6 for several years. Moreover, teachers in primary education, being generalists instead of specialists, must often rely on a broad teaching repertoire rather than deep insight of a specific subject. Furthermore, as previously discussed, the literacy expectations, involving abstract thinking and concepts, must be moderated and actively supported if they are to be reached by Grade 6 students (cf. Bruner, 1986: Vygotsky, 1934/1986; Wells, 1994; Wood et al., 1976). Therefore, a more open-ended exploration of literacy practices is merited, with an eye to what the teacher seeks to achieve in her teaching.

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The analysis draws on several theories to describe literacy practices. My point of departure is that literacy is socially situated and negotiated in social interaction within both informal and institutional settings (cf. Heath, 1983; Street, 1984). As argued by Freebody and Luke (1990; Luke & Freebody, 1999), teachers have a crucial role in involving students in literacy practices of code breaking, meaning making, text use, and critical text analysis. In exploring the literacy practices, the present study draws particularly on Langer's (2011) theory of stances for building knowledge in academic disciplines, describing different orientations to texts. Similar to Luke and Freebody, these stances highlight how teachers create opportunities for students to participate in literacy practices. However, Langer (2011) takes a broader view of literacy that incorporates not only the ways in which texts are used, analyzed, and made meaningful in teaching, but also how students develop disciplinary ways of thinking. With an initial focus on teaching literature, Langer's framework was later adapted to highlight the teaching and learning of content in different school subjects. This includes history, in which students need to develop an understanding for the historical era and gather knowledge about essential events and key historical eras. Moreover, students need to employ critical analysis of text material and other sources of information (Langer, 2011). Therefore, the framework is useful for highlighting how the participating teacher actively positioned the students to the content studied, for example by asking them to imagine life in the historical period, as a way to form an initial understanding, or to consider texts and other sources of information more critically and analytically.

As pointed out by Luke and Freebody (1999), the ways in which teachers conduct classroom discussions is key for understanding students' opportunities to adopt different positions to instructional texts and content. Therefore, I will highlight how the interactions are actively shaped by the teacher as part of the literacy practices studied. In doing this, I will use a framework of communicative approaches (Mortimer & Scott, 2003). Aligned with the ideals of dialogic instruction referred to in the introduction of this article, Mortimer and Scott (2003) have elaborated on the common dichotomy of monologic–dialogic instruction. They propose four different *communicative approaches,* which also consider the degree of interaction invited. The specific operationalizations of Langer's stances, including its relationship with Luke and Freebody's Four Resources Model, and the framework for communicative approaches will be explained in Section 4.1.

4. METHOD AND MATERIAL

The present article is based on a classroom study of the teaching of a content area in Grade 6 about a period in Swedish history, the Vasa era. One teacher and her two classes of Grade 6 students (40 in total) were followed for 12 weeks, spanning 32 lessons. A total of 37.5 hours of teaching was observed (22 hours in one class and

15h 30 minutes in the other) and documented by field notes and audio recordings (35 hours). The teaching material used by the teacher was collected or photographed. In addition, 336 samples of students' writing were documented through photographs. The analysis in the present article is mainly based on transcripts of those audio recordings (88 000 words) focusing on whole-class interaction and peer group text discussions throughout the 12 weeks of teaching. To triangulate the findings, field notes were used to contextualize the recordings and to make preliminary theoretical connections (Fangen, 2005), while both the notes and transcripts were cross-checked with samples of students' writing. This writing is explored more in-depth in another article submitted for publication (Walldén & Lindh, 2020). Informed written consent was collected from the students' caregivers. I also sought the students' continued consent to participate in the study (cf. Tracy, 2010) by asking for permission every time I observed a text discussion or photographed a text. The teaching followed the same structure in the two different classes, although the teacher sometimes made slight changes in her approach.

My choice to establish contact with the relevant school, located in a small town in southern Sweden, was strategic (cf. Thomas, 2011), as the school was known for employing methods such as text discussions to promote students' engagement with disciplinary content. The school is located in an area described as socially disadvantaged, and approximately 40 percent of the students are considered to be second-language learners (evenly distributed among the two groups). No specific information about the students' linguistic proficiency and length of stay in Sweden was collected. However, in describing the classes, the teacher stressed that all the students, regardless of linguistic background, needed support in developing their ability to use language and to interpret disciplinary texts in school.

At the time of study, the participant teacher had worked at the school for seven years and held the career position of "First Teacher" (*förstelärare*). With a degree in teaching Swedish and social studies, she described herself as inexperienced in the teaching of history. As I had scheduled both meetings and informal talks with the teacher, I gleaned that she conducted her teaching inspired by Langer's theory of envisionment building—known to her from teacher training and professional development—and the concept of the "multivoiced classroom". She repeatedly mentioned that she wanted to help the students—whom she described as having little previous knowledge about the relevant era or of Swedish history at all—to "step into the envisionment" (cf. Langer, 2011) and engage with the content through writing and text discussions.

The transcripts have been translated from Swedish to English by the author. Clear emphasis is marked with italics, while omitted talk is marked with "/…/". Students are represented with pseudonyms, or with a generic "S" for "student" when it was not possible hear or otherwise reconstruct who was talking. In the translated transcripts, the verb *to think* (see coming section) always refers to the expression of a thought rather than an opinion.

4.1 Analysis

In Table 1, I present the stances in Langer's (2011) framework for building literacy in academic disciplines. These are also put in relation to Luke and Freebody's framework of literacy, often known as the Four Resources Model (1999). The operationalization and connection between these frameworks build on previous studies of literacy practices in relation to other school subjects (Walldén 2019b, 2019c, 2020c).

Table 1. Framework adapted from Langer and Luke and Freebody.

Stances in envisionment building	**Literacy practices**
Stance 1: Stepping into the envisionment Initial exploration and understanding of the content area	Literacy practices of meaning making
Stance 2: Being in and moving through Developing a deeper understanding of the content studied, processing and contextualizing important historical events and key historical figures	Literacy practices of meaning making
Stance 3: Stepping out and rethinking what you know Re-evaluating previous state of knowledge	Literacy practices of text use
Stance 4: Stepping out and objectifying the experience Looking critically at how history is represented in texts and images	Literacy practices of text analysis

These stances are important for identifying how the teacher positioned the students to engage with the content taught. The particular descriptions of the stances are adapted according to how they have been used to analyze the particular material collected in the present study. In this sense, I have employed an abductive approach (cf. Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2008, pp. 55–56). I use Luke and Freebody's model to condense the findings in terms of students' involvement in literacy practices, including the overall orientation to reading and writing disciplinary texts.

To highlight how the interaction was shaped by the teacher as part of the studied literacy practices, I have used Mortimer and Scott's (2003) framework for communicative approaches. First, a teacher can either take an interactive approach, inviting student answers, or a non-interactive approach by employing a lecturing mode. Secondly, the teacher can display either an authoritative approach, guiding the interaction toward a pre-determined perspective, or a dialogic approach, inviting different possibilities. Taken together, these dimensions make it possible to describe four different approaches. For example, a teacher can employ a lecturing mode at the while pointing out different perspectives, resulting in a dialogic but non-interactive approach. In the present study, the authoritative–dialogic dimension will be the most important, as non-interactive approaches were rarely employed.

In the analysis of interaction as part of literacy practices, I will also use some discursive constructs. This involves the types of questions asked to the students. Exchanges following the triadic structure of known-answer questions (*initiation*, *response*, and *follow-up* or *evaluation*, cf. Lemke, 1990; Mehan, 1979; Sinclair & Coulthardt, 1975; Walldén, 2020b) indicate an authoritative approach, while more

open-ended questions suggest a dialogic approach (cf. Nystrand, 1997; Walldén, 2020b). The analysis will also point to the use of *modalization.* This means intermediate stages between saying something is the case and that it is not the case (cf. Halliday & Mathiessen, 2014, p. 177). In particular, I will highlight when the teacher uses a low modality of probability, for example when involving the students in talks about what *might* be the case. The use of mental processes such as "I think" and "I wonder" (cf. Martin & White, 2005) also indicates low modality. Such interpersonal linguistic resources expand the discourse to entertain different possibilities, indicating a dialogic communicative approach.

In the analytical procedure, the transcripts were first read through repeatedly to search for distinct patterns of the teacher and students engaging with the content. This part of the analysis was conducted in dialogue with Langer's stances, as also reflected in the different headings structuring the findings (see Section 5.1–5.6). At a later stage, the Four Resources Model was used to highlight the literacy practices that were supported by these different orientations to the content (Section 5.7).

4.2 The course about the Vasa era

The teaching observed focuses on the Vasa era in Swedish history (1521–1611), specifically the early part. Under the leadership of Gustav I of Sweden, the country achieved independence by seceding from the Kalmar Union after defeating Christian II of Denmark and breaking with the Papacy. While Gustav I of Sweden's importance for laying the foundations of the modern Swedish state is undisputed, historians have increasingly questioned his portrayal as a benign founding father, pointing to his Machiavellian tactics and his skill in using propaganda and managing his image (L.-O. Larsson, 2002; O. Larsson, 2018). Gustav I of Sweden is popularly known as Gustav Vasa and will be referred to as such in this article.

5. FINDINGS

The following sections (5.1–5.6) focus on different ways in which the students were positioned by the teacher to engage with the content taught, while also highlighting qualities in the interaction as part of literacy practices. In the final section, the studied teaching results will be summed up with reference to participation in different literacy practices.

5.1 Stepping into the imagined world of the Vasa era

A considerable part of the literacy practices observed concerned the promotion of the students' ability to envision life in the Vasa era. In informal talks with the researcher, the teacher mentioned that she wanted to help students "step into the envisionment" or "imagined world" of the Vasa era, a direct reference to Langer's (2011) Stance 1. She expected this to be difficult for many of the students, partly

because several of them were second-language learners with little previous exposure to Swedish history. In one of the first lessons of the course, the teacher asked the migrant language learners about what their parents could tell them about the history of their countries of origin during the corresponding era. Parts of this interaction are shown below.

> T: What did it look like? Haven't you asked?
>
> S: My dad said it was much better.
>
> T: Okay, why?
>
> S: Because there was no war.
>
> T: There wasn't any war. No. Someone else who asked? Loka?
>
> Loka: They said that, like around 500 years ago, there was some guy who tried to fly, and he flew about two meters. And then he fell down. [laughter] /…/
>
> L: That's interesting. [laughter]

Through encouraging the second-language learners to talk with their parents and share knowledge about the corresponding era in other countries, the teacher took a dialogic approach. However, the students seemed to find it difficult to contribute. Several answers, similar to the first one above, referred to conflicts in more recent history.

Another introductory activity aimed at developing an initial understanding of the period took the form of group discussions about how the students pictured life to be in the Vasa era. The teacher introduced this activity as follows:

> T: Okay. Now then, we are about to speculate a bit. That is, we are going to think and talk about how it *might* have been in the Vasa era. /…/ And then there can't really be any wrong or right answer. You just have to think about it. Imagine and think, but this is how I think it *might* have been. /…/ How did the houses look? And what were they made of? Toilets? How did people cook? What did they eat? Were there kebabs?
>
> S: No. [laughter]

The teacher used mental processes ("think", "imagine", "speculate"), low epistemic modality ("might"), and humorous references to modern-day practices ("kebabs") to encourage the students to envision life in the Vasa era. Part of the resulting group interaction is shown below.

> Amila: I think it was like horse and carriage.
>
> Daisy: Horse and carriage.
>
> Amila: Donkeys. Just think if you would bring something to somewhere else. It is not like you could put it into luggage. It was pack-mule. /…/ Well, as for toilets, I think they just had a hole in the ground. [laughter]
>
> Daisy: Yes, a hole in the ground.
>
> Amila: I don't think it was very clean time then.

It is evident that the students had picked up on the teacher's use of mental processes and that they, in a rather unrestrained way, formulated their thoughts about the topics fixed by the teacher.

Another introductory activity consisted of watching an episode from a documentary series called *The History Eaters* (*Historieätarna*, based on BBC's *The Supersizers*), mainly focusing on eating habits in the Vasa era, but also highlighting other aspects of life during this period. The following excerpt shows the interaction, which drew on both the watched episode and previous group discussions.

> T: This Monday, we talked about what things looked like and what life was like for people in those days. Now, what do the *houses* look like? Do you remember? /…/
>
> Vilda: The houses were dark. Or dark inside the houses.
>
> T: Why was that, you think?
>
> Vilda: Because they didn't have lots of windows.
>
> T: Right. And why didn't they switch on the light?
>
> Vilda: There was no electricity.
>
> T: That's right. /…/
>
> Stefan: They were flat. There were no high-rise buildings.
>
> T: No high-rise buildings. No, a maximum of one or two floors. At least for ordinary people. Yes? /…/
>
> S: Where the king lives, there are more floors.
>
> T: Yes, where the king lived. Of course, that castle or that fortress was much bigger. If you remember that castle we saw on The History Eaters—Vadstena. It is much, much bigger, right? And made of stone.

As in the group talks, the teacher involved the students in picturing life in the Vasa era. The question "Why didn't they switch on the light?" positioned them to consider how life was quite different. The episode of *The History Eaters* seemed to function as a resource for starting to make meaning of the era. It was referred to in the above exchange and also in other discussions based on the teaching material used, such as pictures of Gustav Vasa and his wives (see Section 5.6). These activities also prompted questions from the students, for example, about girls' opportunities for education. The activities positioned the students to develop an initial understanding of life in the era when compared with current times, conducive to promoting their capability to put historical events in their proper cultural and historical context.

5.2 Reconstructing events in the Vasa era

The text materials used consisted of two booklets compiled by the teacher from different textbooks and online resources. These served as the basis for weekly discussions in which the teacher frequently positioned the students to reconstruct

important historical events and information about key historical figures. This was achieved through written questions formulated by the teacher such as “Who is Sten Sture the Younger?” and “What happened in the Stockholm Bloodbath?”. The following excerpt shows a text discussion late in the course dealing with a major revolt against Gustav Vasa. The students answered questions about why farmers in southern Sweden revolted and what happened in the conflict, focusing on Gustav Vasa and the leader of the uprising, Nils Dacke. After a while, one of the students, Pahal, seemed to realize that he might have misunderstood what happened with Dacke and Gustav Vasa in the text.

> Pahal: But it was Nils Dacke who revolted against Småland, wasn’t it?
>
> T: Was it?
>
> Markus: Nils Dacke—he killed one of those bailiffs. Then comes Gustav Vasa.
>
> Pahal: Yes, and there like was war in Småland. /…/ But when it started, he revolted against Småland, didn’t he? And then Gustav Vasa helped him. /…/
>
> T: This discussion is really interesting. Here, Pahal has found something out which he all of a sudden didn’t quite *follow*. Something I think you understand well. Tell him. Did Nils Dacke go to war against Småland, or how was it now?
>
> Markus: No, it was Gustav Vasa who went to war against Småland.
>
> T: Exactly right. And what about Nils Dacke? Which side was he on then?
>
> Markus: Well, he was like on Småland’s side. /…/
>
> T: Go on just like that. It’s great. Because you’re helping him.

The teacher questioned Pahal’s reconstruction of events and encouraged the other students to help him. By promoting an extended discussion between the students rather than intervening herself, she showed an interactive and dialogic approach, thus promoting Langer’s Stance 2 (developing understanding) and 3 (reconsidering what one knows).

The teacher also positioned the students to reconstruct events in their weekly notetaking routine. The teacher suggested different ways to organize these notes, such as through mind maps representing sequences of events or written summaries (Walldén & Lindh, 2020). She repeatedly asked the students to refer to the notes to recall earlier parts of the course and as a preparation for the final test. Below is a student note from the text about the Stockholm Bloodbath.

> Kristian II becomes king of Sweden. There is a party. The party ends. Gustav Trolle accuses Sten Sture’s men of heresy. Sten Sture’s men are decapitated.

Although the students’ notes vary in length, detail, and mode of presentation, they are all oriented towards reconstructing and storing knowledge about the events portrayed in the text material. Keeping track of a chronology of events can be seen as a way of developing a more coherent understanding of the era, which relates to Langer’s Stance 2 (Langer, 2011).

5.3 Making connections to personal experience and current times

In some of the text discussions, the teacher positioned the students to make connections to personal experience and current times. In one such instance, the students were asked to discuss why Gustav Vasa learned different things than they had when he was young. An excerpt from a whole-class follow-up is shown below.

> Alexander: Gustav Vasa got to learn about war. How to fight and take care of a big farm, while we get to learn about math. That's so boring.
>
> T: Right. Okay. But why do you think this was?
>
> Alexander: Because there weren't any books about math.
>
> T: Mmm. In fact, there was.
>
> Alexander: There was?

The student seemed surprised that there were books about math in the Vasa era. A similar exchange occurred in one of the group talks when the teacher responded to students' suggestion that Gustav Vasa did not have to learn and write. While the question discussed positioned the students to consider differences between their education and Gustav Vasa's, in the interaction, the teacher pointed out how the king's education was probably not as different as they thought. Like the introductory activities analyzed above, exchanges such as these appeared aimed at the students' developing an initial understanding of the era (Stance 1) while also promoting Stance 3: stepping out to reconsider what one knows (cf. Langer, 2011).

The whole-class follow-up of the text discussion focused on the importance of learning the art of warfare. After asking the students to give reasons why Gustav Vasa would have received such an education, the teacher inquired whether they thought the current King of Sweden, Carl XVI Gustaf, needs to know how to fight wars. This marked one of several occasions when the teacher positioned the students to consider the monarchy and the role of the king by comparing the Vasa era to current times. The frequent use of mental processes in the questions posed—typically variations of "Why do you think…?" or "Do you think…?"—positioned the students to express thoughts about the content rather than to offer correct factual information, indicating a dialogic and interactive approach.

About halfway into the content area, when the teacher introduced the concept of hereditary monarchy, she chose to show the students a picture of the current royal family tree. The teacher had previously explained the notion of hereditary monarchy, but the text had not yet been read by the students. An exchange from the whole-class follow-up is shown below.

> T: What do you wonder about it? You don't wonder *anything*? Then, you get to say something you *might* think then.
>
> S: I don't really know what it's called. When the king dies, his son became king. His son to *his* son.

T: Mm. Do you think so? Now, what was it called? When the king dies and his son becomes king and then his son. What's it called? The *word* we just learned. /…/

Elina: Hereditary monarchy.

T: Hereditary monarchy, yes. /…/ Like this king. [points at the image] His son becomes king. And then it has been passed down like this all the way to our king.

Asking the students what they "wonder" or what a picture "might" represent was a weekly activity. As in one of the introductory activities analyzed above, mental processes ("wonder") and low modality ("might") prompted the students to express thoughts relating to the Vasa era. In this case, the students seemed to find it difficult to express any thoughts, likely due to the abstract and symbolic nature of the image. Switching to a triadic activity structure and a more authoritative approach, the teacher then asked a student about the abstract, subject-related term that the picture was meant to illustrate—hereditary monarchy—and pointed at the picture to highlight how the crown passes between generations. The meaning was further contextualized when the teacher asked the student who would get the crown after Carl XVI of Sweden. As in the previous examples, the exchange positioned the students to make connections between the Vasa era and current times. Here, there is an interaction between stances of being in the envisionment (Stance 2) and stepping out to reconsider what one knows (Stance 3), which seems conducive to students' establishing a frame of reference for historical thinking.

5.4 Acquiring new and content-relevant perspectives

On several occasions, the teacher positioned the students to transcend commonsense understandings and approach more content-relevant perspectives. For instance, in one of the text discussions, the teacher asked the students to search for pictures of Gustav Vasa's wives and give their thoughts on how they looked. Stopping by one of the groups, the teacher asked whether the wives' clothing resembled what was mentioned about typical clothing of the era in *The History Eaters* (cf. Section 5.1). The students confirmed that the queens were "very dressed up" with many layers of clothing. In a whole-class follow-up, the teacher asked a student why Gustav Vasa had several wives.

T: Ala, why did you think Gustav Vasa had three wives?

Ala: Because maybe he wanted more children to take over after him.

T: Yes, that's actually my thought too. /…/ Because if you didn't have any kids as king or if you just got girls /…/ you were in big trouble.

With her questions and elaborations, the teacher positioned the students to appreciate Gustav Vasa's familial life in light of what they had learned about hereditary monarchy. Commenting on Gustav Vasa's numerous children, the teacher further asked why it was necessary to have that many children.

T: Why do you think it was important to have many kids? /…/

> Loka: Maybe because, what's the word? When he got older, they would like take care of him.
>
> T: Yes, might be. /…/
>
> S: The children he birthed could take over, take power on Sweden, after the king had died.
>
> T: Mm. All these answers are kind of true, I believe. What I also believe *might* have been the case is that, in those days, for one, it was pretty common for small babies to die of illnesses of various kinds. And it was also more common for children and adults to die /…/ because common illnesses could kill you in those days.

Several features of the above interaction recurred in the text discussions and follow-ups, thus appearing typical of the teacher's communicative approach. This includes the use of mental processes both for initiating student responses ("Why do you *think*?") and offering her own perspective on the matter discussed ("What I also *believe*") in addition to the frequent use of low modality markers such as *might*. While these techniques indicate an interactive and dialogic approach, it also seems apparent that the teacher, through repeated questions and her own elaborations, wanted the students to approach more abstract perspectives on life in the Vasa era. Below, a similar exchange is shown concerning the appearance of the wives.

> T: How did they look, like, in their facial expression? What do you think? /…/
>
> Elina: Very pale.
>
> T: Very pale. Why do you think that is? You know, in those days, it was *fashionable* to be pale. You were supposed to be *chalk white in* your face. Why do you think that was? /…/
>
> Loka: I think if they looked tanned, they would look like dirty.
>
> T: Yeees. [rising tone] And they would look like something else.
>
> Anders: Were they racists or what?
>
> T: No. [students all laugh]. No, but it's good that you are guessing. But like this. Those people who were out *working* like on fields and fishing and had to work for their money and food. They got tanned, right? Then, these richest kings and queens, they wanted to show that they didn't have to do that kind of work.

As before, the teacher asked an open-ended question and used the students' answers to elaborate on life in the Vasa era, in this case, about changing beauty ideals. Students' answers, such as that the queens looked dirty and that Gustav Vasa had many children so they could take care of him, reflect commonsense understandings that the teacher did not dismiss, but rather probed further and related to her own elaborations. Thus, the teacher employed a hybrid communicative approach by asking for the students' thoughts while also contributing with her own knowledge to help the students gain new and more content-relevant perspectives, involving understanding the images in relation to the historical and cultural context. As a result, the students were supported in using historical thinking to contextualize important information, thereby developing their understanding of the content (Stance 2). This

could also have been conducive to the students' reconsidering what they thought they knew (Stance 3).

5.5 Wondering and making inferences when reading texts and images

In the course, the students were often positioned by the teacher to express their thoughts about the texts and images in the material provided to them. This resulted in a more open-ended exploration of the text material than the discussions aimed at reconstructing important events (cf. Section 5.2). Specifically, this often involved articulating what an image might represent or inferring something which was not explicitly stated in the text. The transcript below is from the first text discussion, which deals with Christian II invading Sweden.

> T: Does everyone get what "invade" means? Good. And how did it happen? What do you think? Anders?
>
> Anders: That he just took his men and entered and maybe said that either they /…/ join his team or they die.
>
> T: Just so. But how did the invasion happen?
>
> Anders: They just went in.
>
> T: Yes, okay, but tell it like this. Imagine that you see this in front of you. How did it look like? Tell me how it looked.
>
> Anders: Maybe that they walked from village to village or to the next town. Then until they had it all.
>
> T: Yes, did they walk or what did they have?
>
> Anders: Horses and carriages.
>
> T: Horse. Carriage.
>
> Anders: Mostly horse, I think. /…/
>
> T: Yes, what kind of weapon did they have then?
>
> Anders: Swords and maybe bows and crossbow. /…/
>
> Fadi: I think they sat on horses, and then they went into all of Sweden with swords.
>
> T: Yes, very possible.

Just as in the open-ended talks about life and society in the Vasa era, the discourse was characterized by mental processes ("think", "imagine") and low-modality markers ("maybe"). Again, the teacher positioned the students to express thoughts that, in this case, required them to infer how the invasion happened and what it looked like. This is further evidence of the teacher's desire for the students to envision the Vasa era. Prompted by the teacher, the students offered examples of weapons and modes of transportation which were then positively evaluated. The exchange also points, indirectly, to the lack of more specific information about the events in the text, of which the relevant part is shown below.

> In the beginning of the 16th century, Sweden is ruled by a man called Sten Sture the Younger. In Denmark, Christian II reigned. He wanted to take Sweden back, which for many years had been a part of the Kalmar Union (a cooperation between Norway, Denmark, and Sweden). In the year 1520, Christian II invades Sweden together with his battalions. But then, Sten Sture and his men resisted. Sten Sture dies, but his wife /…/ continues the fight. (Text excerpted by the teacher from Clio.se [Moberg, 2019])

More than once, the students were asked to infer motivations or outcomes of events that would likely have been explicitly stated or depicted in a more substantial text. In this way, their opportunities to acquire new knowledge from the material (Stance 3) appeared to be constricted. Limitations in the teaching material are further discussed in a related study (Walldén, 2020a).

The students were also regularly positioned to express their thoughts in a pre-reading activity in which they were asked to write down what they saw, wondered about and/or thought might be represented in a picture connected to the historical events or figures in focus. In this activity, the teacher had been directly inspired by Adrienne Gear's (2008/2015) strategy for inferring and asking questions about non-fiction texts. Based on a worksheet from Gear's book, the teacher asked the students to glue the aforementioned picture in their notebook and write their thoughts according to the structure of "I see …", "I wonder …", and "Maybe …". Requiring the students to use mental processes ("I wonder") and low modality ("maybe"), the notetaking resembled the language used and modelled by the teacher in the spoken interaction. Much like the previously mentioned family tree, another puzzling image shown to the students was a representation of the House of Vasa's coat of arms (see Figure 1).

In their notes, many students described the coat of arms as a shield, but some, probably having gleaned information from the text, pointed it out as an escutcheon (the more transparent Swedish term being *vapensköld*, i.e., "weapon shield"). The students also noticed the color—in some cases describing it as a flag or even the French flag. Moreover, many students expressed that it might be something related to the king. Regarding the cryptic object in the middle, one student described it as "something that looks like a moustache", while others wondered if it was a log or a flute. Parts of the interaction in the whole-class follow-up are shown below.

> T: You think it is the French flag. Why would it appear on a Swedish escutcheon then? If you like, have a guess at it. I think's it a good guess, but. /…/
>
> S: Maybe it's Gustav Vasa's sons or /…/ One of his daughters that's married to a Frenchman.
>
> T: Yes, right. One of his daughters who's married to a Frenchman. That is also possible. /…/ Oh wow, you are really good at guessing! Yes?
>
> S: What's in the middle? [Teacher having asked what they wonder]
>
> T: Yes, what do you think is in the middle?
>
> S: A sword handle. A sword handle.
>
> T: Okay. A sword handle. It looks a bit like it. What do you think?

S: It looks a bit like a wooden goat.

T: Right. Almost like a yule goat, maybe.

Figure 1. Picture of Gustav I of Sweden and his escutcheon, as displayed in the text material given to the students (Körner, 1999, pp. 106–107).

As before, the teacher encouraged and affirmed different suggestions, giving a strong positive evaluation of a student making connections to Gustav Vasa's family: "Oh wow, you are really good at guessing." She also entertained the idea of the object in the middle being a sword handle, a wooden goat, or a *yule goat* often depicted in Scandinavian Christmas celebrations. As before, low-modality markers were common in the exchange: the discourse was concerned with what the students *thought* or could *guess*, and with what might *possibly* be displayed in the middle. The teacher then clarified that it is supposed to be a fascine, which is used in warfare.

T: What they think that thingamajig in the middle means is a so-called fascine. It is a very weird word. And it's a bunch of branches with twigs they have bound together and /…/ used in the military as some kind of weapon. That's what they think it is.

S: But what is it used for?

T: Well, it was used in the military in some way.

Also, in this elaboration on the object being a fascine, the teacher used several low modality makers such as mental processes ("maybe") and hedging ("some kind of", "so-called", "in some way"). The use of low modality seems appropriate, as the interpretation of the Vasa coat of arms—which still forms part of the coat of arms of Sweden—has intrigued and promoted debate among historians (cf. L.-O. Larsson, 2002, pp. 24–25). Seen this way, the students were engaged in a discussion mirroring a practice of historical inquiry.

While retaining an interactive and dialogic approach, the teacher began, towards the end of the course, to evaluate the students' proposals in light of the knowledge previously gained about Gustav Vasa in the preceding weeks. Before the exchange shown below, the students had written down their thoughts about a picture of Gustav Vasa shouting at his audience. The Dalecarlians, mentioned in the exchange, were a hardy peasantry known for both aiding and rebelling against Gustav Vasa.

> T: Thinking about what we had read so far about Gustav Vasa /…/ What do you think this is about? Why is he shouting? You can't know. You can just guess. /…/
>
> Loka: I think he asks or shouts to ask if the Dalecarlians want to help him.
>
> T: Okay. He might have wanted help from the Dalecarlians again.
>
> S: Or they hadn't paid their taxes.
>
> T: Ah, excellent! They hadn't paid *tax*. Gustav Vasa wanted money all the time, didn't he? *That* could be it as well. Two suggestions which are great and completely relevant. It could possibly be what he actually says considering what we already *know* about Gustav Vasa.

A similarly positively evaluated response proposed that the picture could be connected to the Reformation of Sweden, which they had read about the week before. While the teacher maintained the use of mental processes and low-modality markers, she also pointed to how the suggestions aligned with knowledge gathered from previous texts. This reinforcement of content-relevant perspectives is further evidence of the aforementioned hybrid communicative approach. The literacy practice of asking questions based on sources such as texts and images is connected to developing an understanding of the content (Stance 2).

5.6 Discussing representations of key historical figures

Overall, supporting the students' initial immersion in the Vasa era and promoting an understanding of life and important events in the era appeared as a main priority in the teaching. However, on some occasions, the students were positioned to step out and objectify the images and texts encountered. As mentioned in Section 5.1, the students were to search for pictures of Gustav Vasa's wives and comment on their appearance. They were also asked to give their thoughts about how Gustav Vasa looked, as a representation of a well-known portrait of him was part of the text material for that week (see Figure 1). Below is a short excerpt from one of the talks after the students found a picture of Katarina Stenbock, Gustav Vasa's first wife.

> Loka: Wait, Gustav Vasa's wives. /…/ Wow, she's ugly! She is super creepy.
>
> Anders: But she's supposed to look modern, right?
>
> Loka: Yes! [laughing]

The female student reacted laughingly with a strong negative evaluation of Katarina Stenbock's portrait, while Anders offered that "she's supposed to look modern". Here, the students focused on how the queen was represented. The students were also asked to describe how Gustav Vasa looked and what characteristics he seemed to have. The latter question positioned the students to infer information about Gustav Vasa from the picture.

> Anders: I think he is pretty strong because he looks pretty beefy. /…/ Since he had success in war, he ought to be pretty strong and smart as well. /…/
>
> Loka: But it's the clothing that makes him beefy.

In his positive evaluation of Gustav Vasa, Anders connected the picture to what the students had read earlier about Gustav Vasa's success in the uprising against Christian II of Denmark. However, Loka attributed the "beefiness" to Gustav Vasa's clothing. This marked a more distanced take on the representation of Gustav Vasa, which was reinforced when she stated that "I think he wore gold clothes and stuff like that to show his power." Parts of the whole-class follow-up are shown below:

> Leo: He looks like he has real power because he looks like a king. Because he has clothes like of the highest fashion.
>
> T: Right. /…/ But I'm also thinking about how he looks in the way he's posing and his face and so on. What do you think about his character? That is, how he is as a person when you look at the picture? Vilda, what do you say?
>
> Vilda: He looks angry and stern.
>
> Anders: He looks like he'll get what he wants, and he looks very strong. /…/
>
> Loka: He like shows his power in the way he dresses.
>
> T: Yes. Excellent. I believe so. That he's making a display, and people today to like that also, right? /…/ I wondered if he really looked like that when the artist painted him. It might be that he /…/ just said to the artist like this, "Make sure it looks like I'm in charge. /…/ After all, I'm the king." He's painted in profile and really looks that strong and stately.

Students pointed to the king's fashionable clothing— "highest fashion" being a phrase taken from the image's caption in the textbook—and his stern look, with Loka again remarking that he was demonstrating his power. In her elaboration, the teacher referred to Gustav Vasa and how he might have dictated how he should be painted. Using low-modality markers and mental processes—building on the positively evaluated responses offered by the students—the teacher modelled a way to think more critically about the representation of Gustav Vasa.

A few weeks earlier, a portrait of Christian II of Denmark had been discussed in a similar way (without the students being told it was Christian II). One student wondered why he looked angry, and the teacher asked why they thought that was.

> S: He maybe thought it was uncomfortable to sit still.
>
> T: Yes, right? I'm sure he sat there for a really long time and got wearier and wearier and hungrier and hungrier. Well.
>
> Anders: He just wanted to show that he was powerful. /…./
>
> T: Yes, I find that a pretty good analysis of his expression. If we pretend that this is a king. And if this king had looked something like this on the picture. [makes a silly, happy face while the other students laugh] Do you believe that those he ruled would feel much respect for him then, in those days? /…/ I don't know, I just think it was a pretty smart thought /…/ that in those days you have to look a bit grim to show your power as king.

Using jokes ("he got hungrier and hungrier") and playful facial expressions, the teacher pointed to how the portrait represented a key historical figure in a commanding way. In these exchanges, the teacher encouraged the students to look at pictures as something that could be objectified and talked about in terms of how the monarchs likely wanted to be represented, in line with Langer's Stance 4 (2011). However, while talking about pictures was a prevalent occurrence, the interaction did not touch on how these pictures could be evaluated as sources of information about history. The excerpt below, showing an exchange about an image relating to a major uprising against Gustav Vasa, further illustrates this uncritical orientation to images.

> T: In this picture, what makes you think that it is from the past? That it's not, like, modern? Anders?
>
> Anders: It has no colors.
>
> T: It has no colors. Okay, but even if it had colors, you would still think it was from the old days. What does Pahal think?
>
> Pahal: They have such days of old clothing. /…/
>
> T: Can you give an example of something you think no one would wear these days?
>
> Pahal: Eh, the white shirt.
>
> T: Yes. Exactly. Almost like a kind of dress with a belt around the waist. That would be really unusual if you showed up with that now.

The image in question is a modern interpretation of the Dacke uprising (e.g. Världens historia, n.d.). However, in this exchange, it is clear that the image is assumed to be of the same era. The references to clothing typical of the era mirror exchanges on the same topic early in the course. Therefore, the interaction again seemed aimed at students' developing an understanding of the era (Stance 2). This priority might have limited the opportunity to evaluate images as sources of information about the Vasa era.

As for the text material used in the content area, previous sections have shown how the students were positioned to reconstruct historical events, expressing thoughts about them, and in some cases, making connections to personal experience. A text discussion marked the only instance observed in which the students were positioned to consider the veracity of the information found in historical

texts. Based on a section in the material explaining how Gustav Vasa's uprising was embellished in a famous chronicle, the students were asked to discuss the difference between "history" and "stories". The corresponding Swedish words are bracketed in the transcript.

> Anders: You can make up stories [historier], but history [historia] is something that has happened.
>
> Loka: But a history can also be made up.
>
> Anders: Yes, but if you say, "It is history," then it has happened.

Anders likely answered the question according to the intention of the textbook author, but Loka's bewilderment seems valid, as the Swedish word *historia* ["history" or "story"] is also the singular form of *historier* ("stories"). The potential for further discussions about the accuracy and validity of the historical sources remained untapped, as the teacher did not follow up on this particular text discussion and also omitted the "stories" exemplified in the original textbook in the booklet given to students. Moreover, the choice to compile a booklet from different textbooks may have been detrimental to teaching literacy practices of text analysis (cf. Luke & Freebody, 1999) in other ways. For example, the online resource from which the teacher excerpted texts used early in the course (Clio, 2020) contains separate sections for contrasting sources representing Gustav Vasa and for discussing the use of historical sources more generally, while a textbook that was deemed too challenging for the students pointed to the embellished nature of popular images and chronicles about Gustav Vasa (Ljunggren & Frey-Skött, 2015).

5.7 Promoting students' engagement in literacy practices

In summary, the results show that the teaching was strongly oriented towards supporting the students' participation in literacy practices of meaning-making (Luke & Freebody, 1999). In their written texts and oral exchanges, the students were positioned to develop a rudimentary grasp of life in the era and to reconstruct important events. They were also offered opportunities to make connections to personal experience, and to compare the past to current times. In addition, they were encouraged to freely express thoughts about the texts and images in the teaching material. On some occasions, it was also clear that that the students, in the spoken interactions, were positioned to use the texts for re-evaluating previous knowledge. However, the findings also show that the texts used—and the way in which they were used—may have limited the students' opportunities to engage in critical literacy practices of text analysis. To a large extent, the text material seemed to figure as a resource for promoting extended interaction in group and whole-class settings, rather than for learning from the texts or evaluating them critically. In relation to Langer's theory (2011), the students were afforded rich opportunities for initial immersion in the content and for developing an understanding of the era through interaction and peer group talks (Stances 1 and 2). The stances pertaining

to the analysis of written sources (Stance 4) and learning new things from them (Stance 3) could have been reinforced.

6. DISCUSSION

Through what has been highlighted as a hybrid communicative approach, the teacher engaged the students in open-ended exchanges, in which different suggestions were entertained and encouraged—sometimes in ways that mirrored authentic historical inquiry—while also elaborating on perspectives that transcended students' commonsense understandings. These appear to be important qualities for promoting students' engagement and early literacy development in the subject.

However, the results show that while the teacher positioned the students to discuss how key historical figures were represented in portraits, neither the texts' nor the images' validity as sources of information about the era were mentioned. As research focusing on teacher preparation has noted, students' exposure to conflicting sources is a key factor in developing disciplinary literacy in history (Monte-Sano et al, 2015; Howard & Guidry, 2017). Therefore, the students' opportunities to participate in critical text analysis practices central to the study of history were limited (cf. Fitzgerald, 2019; Shanahan & Shanahan, 2008; Wineburg & Reisman, 2015). Luke and Freebody (1999) have pointed out that the different families of literacy practices are interconnected and co-dependent. This certainly rings true for literacy practices in the teaching of history, as making meaning of history also depends on the ability to assess and learn from sources of historical information—which is also expected of students according to both the national curriculum and guidance documents. Echoing the findings of previous research into literacy practices in social studies, the teaching did not appear fully aligned with the literacy expectations of the syllabus (Staf, 2019; Molin & Grubbström, 2013; Lindh, 2019; Samuelsson & Wendell, 2016).

The way the participant teacher created opportunities for the students to acquire background knowledge of life in the era, provided guiding questions, and modelled how to think about the content in ways that transcend commonsense understandings can promote students' abilities to contextualize information (cf. Avishad & Wineburg, 2008). However, these activities were based on spoken exchanges rather than evaluations of written texts. As for the use of writing prompted by the teacher, two main purposes could be identified: storing knowledge through notetaking, and expressing thoughts about images. In contrast to previous Nordic studies of the school subject of history, the writing was actively modelled and prompted by the teacher, and in many ways was geared towards making the students think about the content (cf. Christensen et al., 2014; Lind, 2019; Ohrem Bakke, 2019). While opportunities to write texts central to communicating knowledge in history—for example through explanations and arguments—were limited, it would appear as if the notetaking and questioning activities could be expanded to involve noting and asking questions about discrepancies between sources, as a basis for more complex writing.

The present study underlines the importance of viewing literacy practices in disciplines such as history, not only in terms of pre-conceived literacy expectations, but also with regard to how they are actively shaped by teachers' priorities and instructional choices in supporting the students. Only through such qualitative understandings can these practices be re-shaped.

7. CONCLUSION

The findings of this study provide further evidence of the need for history teaching to be grounded in an understanding of how to promote students' critical thinking about the content and sources encountered. However, as a lot of previous research has focused on teaching in higher grades, it is important to consider how the instruction must also be adapted to younger students' prior knowledge and commonsense ways of thinking. The second-language students' apparent difficulty in relating the Vasa era to a corresponding period in their country of origin clearly indicates the cultural and cognitive challenge facing both the teacher and the students. Therefore, it is important to point out the crucial work conducted by the Grade 6 teacher in engaging students in a culture of thinking about the Vasa era, which involved developing their understanding of the period, guiding them towards more abstract perspectives, and encouraging them to express their thoughts in unrestrained ways. Efforts such as these can be further built upon to look more analytically at the texts and images studied, promoting a more developed historical thinking and participation in critical literacy practices.

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