

LITERARY SOCIALIZATION THROUGH EDUCATION

A comparative study of Swedish and French upper secondary school students' reception of a narrative text and the paradox of literature education

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Abstract

Different ways of teaching literature in school are often a result of tradition, cultural heritage, and the underlying assumptions of the motivating reasons for studying literature at all. This paper presents results from a comparative study of Swedish and French upper secondary school students' reception of a narrative text and discusses the impact of literary socialisation in relation to curricula. In the first part of the paper, Swedish and French upper secondary school students' written comments on a short story are analysed in terms of literary socialisation, comprehension and interpretation. The study displays differences in the way the students interact with the text. The French students pay more attention to literary aspects, such as style and language, whereas Swedish students tend to focus more on content and extratextual aspects. In the second part of the paper, the Swedish curriculum for the subject Swedish for upper secondary school is analysed. The study argues that a combination of analytic and emotional reading seems to be the most efficient way to create skilful readers. Reading for pleasure in a school context is challenged by the strong framing provided by knowledge requirements and examinations. The study concludes that this paradox of literature education can be met by focusing on the reading experience as a point of departure for in-depth literature studies.

Keywords: literature education, literature reception, literary socialization, upper secondary school, written comments, curricula

1

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1. INTRODUCTION

The most important factor for keeping a high literacy level, regardless of the students' background, is education (Boudard, 2001; Desjardins, 2003). From that perspective, educational research is fundamental for our understanding of how to develop students' abilities to read and to understand what they read. Good reading skills are important for citizens in modern societies and literature education can contribute to the development of competent readers. Comparative studies across national borders can provide new perspectives and a more profound understanding of one's own practice. The most well-known comparisons within the educational field are the OECD PISA and PIRLS assessments, which often attract the public's attention through the media. These worldwide evaluations can be criticised for not taking national or genre-related differences into enough consideration and for not seeking explanations to different outcomes. There are certainly important differences between different schooling systems and when it comes to literature education the most important difference lies in purpose, which has an impact on how the literary text is dealt with in the literature classroom.

Reading and analysing literary texts is an important part of the L1 subject in most countries, even though significance and aims can vary across nations (cf. Gourvenec et al., 2020, amongst others). Different approaches to literary texts in school have proven to have an impact on how students understand and interpret the texts (Torell et al., 2002), which means that the way literature is taught is crucial for the creation of future literate citizens.

This paper discusses literary socialisation through education in relation to cultural contexts and educational traditions reflected in national curricula for upper secondary school, using Sweden and France as examples, to gain a better understanding of how two western European countries organise their literature education. The paper also discusses the implications of different literature education traditions on the students' interaction with the literary text. The paper consists of two parts. The first part is a comparative study¹ of Swedish and French upper secondary school students' reception of a narrative text ("The Banshee" by Joyce Carol Oates, 2005), which discusses how students are socialised into different ways of interacting with the literary text. The second part comprises an analysis of the significance of literature in the current curriculum for L1 in Sweden. Since the collection of empirical data for the first study, the Swedish curriculum has changed, which calls for a renewed analysis. The aim of the study is thus to analyse and discuss how cultural traditions that permeate L1 curricula contribute to the formation of the readers of today. The aim is also to contribute a discussion on how literature education—with knowledge of the impact of literary socialisation—can be

¹ *The comparative reception study has previously been published in Swedish in Johansson, M. (2015). Read, understand, analyse. A study of Swedish and French upper secondary students' reception of a narrative text. The results are summarised in this article.*

developed to meet challenges in a modern society, where students take less interest in reading. The research questions explored in the study are:

- What kind of readers are shaped through literature education in Sweden and France?
- How can the differences be explained in relation to tradition and cultural understandings of literature education on the one hand, and curricula on the other?
- How do cultural traditions reflected in L1 curricula affect students' development as literature readers?

The study is based on the premises that reading skills are crucial for the citizens of today and that literature education can contribute to the development of skilled, analytical literature readers as well as to personal growth and well-educated students.

2. PREVIOUS RESEARCH

There have for a long time been warning signs, in Sweden as well as in France, that young people are taking less interest in reading (Baudelot et al., 1999; Brozo, 2002; IVA, 2021; Millard 1997a, b), regardless of whether they read on the screen or in a traditional book, although the picture is somewhat contradictory (Nordberg, 2017). The lack of reading interest collides with the demands of high reading competence within most professional areas and with the intentions of policymakers regarding literature education

Studies of literature education over the past decades, both in Sweden and France, have provided important information on these issues in relation to how the literary text is dealt with in the classroom. Debate has long prevailed as to whether the reader or the text should be at the centre of literature education—or the interaction between them. From a Swedish perspective, studies within the field of literature education show that Swedish students have traditionally been good at relating fictive worlds and characters to their own daily life (Pettersson, 2015; Torell et al., 2002), but also that they tend to step out of the literary text instead of digging deeper into it. They are also less interested in or good at performing literary analysis using literary conceptual tools (Johansson, 2019). National studies have shown that neither teaching (Bergman, 2007; Tengberg, 2011), textbooks (Englund, 1997; Dahl, 2015; Lilja Waltå, 2017) nor curricula (Gourvennec et al., 2020) prepare them for this. Traditionally, Swedish literature education is reader oriented. French students are better prepared for an analytic approach to the literary text and are text-oriented to a greater extent. Teaching methods within L1 in France have been criticised for not taking the students' interests and personalities into enough consideration. Consequently, the pleasure of reading is threatened, not only by competition from other media forms, but from literature education itself. Bertrand Daunay addressed this issue back in 2007 and criticised school practice for copying a practice of scholarly reading of literary texts instead of meeting younger students at their level

of intellect (Daunay, 2007, p. 155). There seems to be a risk in the French context that literature teaching becomes too technical and does not encourage students to read for pleasure. Studies from Norway exploring the dialogue between student and literary practice come to similar conclusions: literature education must be of relevance from a student's perspective and encourage exploration of the text (Gourvenec, 2017).

The balance between reading for pleasure and reading for assessment—the paradox of literature education—has also been discussed and investigated recently by, for instance, Olle Nordberg (2017) and Spoke Wintersparv (2021) in a Swedish context and by Marianne Furumo and Anne-Beathe Mortensen-Buan in Norway (2020). Nordberg—in line with Gourvenec—argues that literature education should focus on the readers first and use their experiences to organise meaningful literature education. Wintersparv investigates the focus on measurability and concludes that teachers must take the experiential reading into account if students are going to develop a literature proficiency instead of a literacy proficiency (Wintersparv 2021, p. 58). Furumo and Mortensen-Buan explore literature education and discuss how the meeting between a reader and a canonical text (*Hamlet*) in a school setting can be fruitful when activating a student's perspective. They argue that the analytical aspects asked for in curricula can only be meaningful to students if they also feel some kind of passion towards the studied text. Teachers working within the context of the International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme describe working with the analysis of complex texts as fruitful for developing reading, interpreting, and analysing skills, alongside awakening or keeping the students' interest in reading (Johansson & Nordenstam, 2020). Working with complex literary texts has also showed promising results in engaging students in discussions on literary texts (Johansen, 2015; Sønneland & Skaftun, 2017).

Current research seems to validate the view that literature education needs to activate two types of reading: one personal and one professional. Recently, there has been a growing interest in how to unite emotional and analytical issues in literature education. This issue is dealt with differently within different contexts and underpins the importance of understanding the mechanisms of literary socialisation. Research on the subject has been mostly restricted to studies within one national context, but this study adds a comparative perspective and further investigates the effects of literary socialisation, while also discussing its importance for developing reading skills among young students of today.

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

This study draws on different theoretical frameworks. The study draws on theories of literary socialisation and on reception theory about the interaction between the reader and the text. These theories are mainly used in the first part of the study. The second part draws on theories regarding the framing of literature education.

3.1 *Literary socialisation*

A way of understanding students' ability to interact with literary texts is to describe it as "literary socialisation", a notion which is mostly used to describe how literature education can cater for students from a non-reading background. Pieper (2011) puts this forward as a key issue yet to be solved:

[...] how to design learning contexts in such a way that 'Bildung' is not what learners need to bring with them in order to unfold it further, but opportunities are offered for experiences which allow students to develop their potential as readers. (Pieper, 2011, p. 190)

Gerbert Kraaykamp (2003) defines literary socialisation as follows: "Literary socialisation means that both cognitive and motivational resources are strengthened by concrete activities or circumstances in social interaction, which foster children's cultural development" (Kraaykamp, 2003, p. 235-236). In the present study, the concept of literary socialisation does not take the students' background or social status into consideration. Instead, "literary socialisation" is applied to discuss how literature *education* affects the student's interaction with the literary text and their evaluation as readers.

3.2 *Reception theory*

Part 1 of the present study is a qualitative reception study, and thus reception theorists inspire the theoretical framework. Theories about the reader's interaction with the text (Iser, 1978) are used to explain patterns in students' response to the text. Iser (1978) describes the reader's interaction with the literary text as an interaction both with the artefactual text and with its gaps. There are, according to Iser, certain structures in a text that appear in the same way for different readers, but also gaps that will be interpreted differently by different readers, due to their personality, their background and their literary as well as their general experience. Reception theory is used to explain how the students interact with the text and to what extent they use text structures to interpret. Reception theory is well suited to discussing the extent to which the reader or the text is the point of departure for literature education within different contexts.

3.3 *Curricula and framing*

To analyse the curriculum, Bernstein's (1975; 1990) concepts of collection and integrated codes are used. In the briefest of terms, collection codes can be referred to as subject-based, and each subject draws a clear line to other subjects. They also make use of a complex control system. Bernstein also uses the concept of framing to describe to what extent curricula specify the subject's content and teaching methods. Within the collection code, there is a strong classification, and a strong frame. Curricula and final exams have a controlling function, and the teachers have

relatively little room for manoeuvre. In the French system, for instance, authorships and literary epochs are specified in the programme for upper secondary school and literature education is focused on helping the students to succeed in the final exams. This means that the final exams are an important part of the framing. Integrated codes, on the other hand, are interdisciplinary and collaboration is fundamental. School subjects have a weak classification and the boundaries between subjects are also weaker. The teachers have a freedom of choice to a greater extent. There can also be differences within the same system so that a subject has a strong classification and a weak framing. In this study, the notions are used to shed light on the differences between Sweden and France regarding the framing via policy documents.

In addition, the curriculum is analysed from a theoretical perspective, building on Bruner's (1986) view of syntagmatic and paradigmatic thinking. Syntagmatic thinking is linear (past-present-future) and often related to everyday communication, whereas paradigmatic thinking is non-linear and related to a scientific way of organising the world (Bruner, 1986, pp. 11-13). In reading, syntagmatic thinking can refer to identification and empathy. Paradigmatic thinking can be set in motion through written or oral analysis of literary texts. The study takes an interest in understanding the extent to which syntagmatic and paradigmatic thinking are privileged in curricula for L1 in Sweden and France and how this affects students' interaction with the text, as it is represented in the written comments.

4. METHOD AND METHODOLOGY

4.1 Material and participants—part one

The empirical part of the study is based on a corpus of 223 written comments on a short story, "The Banshee" by Joyce Carol Oates (2005), originally written in English. The task, which was introduced to the students at the beginning of each data collection session, was to read the short story and then to write a text (of any length) on what the students—as readers—noticed when reading. The students had 60 minutes at their disposal. The instruction was intentionally kept open, to avoid any influence on what to write. The written comments vary in length, from a couple of words to about two handwritten pages.

The written comments were collected in eight different upper secondary schools (five in Sweden and three in France), both vocational and general, in five cities (two in Sweden and three in France) in different parts of the two countries. The students are 16 to 18 years old. The towns and schools were chosen to provide a range of students with different backgrounds. The towns have a population of 5,000 to 150,000 people. The selection of schools can be described as a convenience sample, although aiming at a variation of students from different backgrounds. The Swedish students were in their last year of upper secondary school ("årskurs 3"). The French students were in their second year ("première"), since the mandatory L1 studies end

after year 2 in French upper secondary school. Tables 1 and 2 below describe the distribution of students and schools in the two countries. 133 girls and 89 boys participated in the study (one student has not indicated sex). Sex and gender aspects are not taken into consideration in the analysis.

Table 1. Sweden: schools and students

School	Number of students	Teachers
School 1, rural town	39	A, B, C
School 2, town	23	D
School 3, town	42	E, F
School 4, town	9	G
TOTAL	113	

Table 2. France: schools and students

School	Number of students	Teachers
School 5, rural town	45	I
School 6, rural town	11	J
School 7, town	34	K
School 8, small town	20	L
TOTAL	110	

4.1.1 “The Banshee”

The short story was chosen by the researcher (i.e., the author of this article) as it fulfilled the following criteria: it is from a different cultural context (USA) than that of the participants. The setting is an upper-middle-class environment on the American east coast, where a woman is hosting a cocktail party for the neighbours. Her six-year-old daughter tries in vain to get the mother’s attention but when she fails, she picks up her new-born baby brother and carries him up onto the roof. The short story has an open ending—when it ends, the girl is sitting on the rooftop with the baby in her arms and starts to feel dizzy—and we do not know what will happen to the girl and her brother. Moreover, the vocabulary was considered not too challenging and at the same time there are possibilities for a deeper analysis, since the structure can be considered complicated, with analepses and an open ending. There are several gaps that call for an interpretation by the reader. The title is connected to an explanation of the word “banshee”—a spirit that howls at night in a house where someone is about to die, and the mother says that the baby sounds like a banshee when he cries at night. The story is told from the little girl’s point of view.

Both groups read the short story in translation. The translations have been compared to the original and to each other to make sure that there were not any elements that would be likely to interfere with the results.

4.1.2 *Analysis*

The analysis of the students' written comments was performed through a thematic analysis (Boyatzis, 1998; Braun & Clarke, 2006), the purpose of which was to identify general patterns that might be explained by literary socialisation. The 223 handwritten comments were transcribed and read through several times, after which a coding of different parts of the texts took place. Using colour coding, the texts could then be sorted into three main categories, which are referred to as domains. The notion of domain has been inspired by Mary Macken-Horarik (1998) but is not used according to her definition. In this study, a domain is a zone in which the students' texts are placed according to their main content. The choice to use the concept of domain derives from a desire to signal that the categories are overlapping and not hierarchical. The three main categories are called content-related, extratextual and literary domains. A few texts have not been categorised since they are too brief. These texts are referred to as "other".

To further investigate the impact of the students' choices, an analysis of what is expressed in the students' written comments as difficult to understand has been conducted within a sample of 41 (23 French and 18 Swedish) that explicitly express comprehension-related issues. Throughout this paper, the term comprehension will refer to an everyday meaning, that is understanding what happens in the short story. The analysis investigates which resources are used to make meaning. Comprehension is also related to interpretation of the gaps (Iser, 1978) in the narrative text, and therefore students' interpretations of a selection of gaps in the short story have been analysed, mainly to understand which tools they use to interpret the gaps.

A comparative perspective permeates the analysis, in which the two nations constitute the basis for comparison. The aim is to understand how the cultural context impacts the students' reception of the text, which is why no other angles, such as sex or study programme, are investigated.

4.2 *Material—part two*

In part two of the article, the current curriculum for L1 in Sweden is analysed. The material consists of the curriculum for the subject Swedish and the parts analysed are the aims, the core content and the knowledge requirements (Swedish National Agency for Education, 2011). The subject Swedish is divided into several courses, with different knowledge requirements for each course. However, the aim and core content are valid for all courses. "Swedish 1" is mandatory for all students regardless of study programme. "Swedish 2" and "Swedish 3" are mandatory for students following a non-vocational programme. The courses "Literature", "Rhetoric" and "Writing" are optional. In this analysis the aim of the subject, as introduced in the curriculum, and the core content for "Swedish 1–3" are included, as well as knowledge requirements for each course.

5. SWEDISH AND FRENCH STUDENTS' RECEPTION OF A NARRATIVE TEXT

The analysis of the participating students' written comments starts with a description of patterns identified in the texts, followed by a comparative analysis. It is followed by an analysis of how the students construct meaning, through an effort to understand the plot and by interpreting gaps in the text.

5.1 *Patterns in the students' written comments*

To clarify patterns in the students' written comments, a categorisation of the 223 texts was performed. It revealed that the point of departure taken by most students is *the content*, and at least one or two sentences are a resumé of the plot. From this point of departure, the written comments follow different paths—they either remain within the plot (content-related), or they leave the literary text to focus on other issues (extratextual), or they remain in the text, focusing on literary and stylistic aspects (literary). Table 3 shows the share of the different types of texts from the two national contexts:

Table 3. Share (percentage) of the different types of texts

	Content-related	Extratextual	Literary	Other	
Swedish texts	55.7	19.5	23.0	1.8	100
French texts	28.2	4.5	62.8	4.5	100
n	94	27	95	7	223

What stands out in this table is the high number of Swedish texts in the Content-related category and of French texts in the Literary category. What also stands out is the difference between Swedish and French texts in the Extratextual category.

5.1.1 *The content-related domain*

The written comments categorised as belonging to the content-related domain focus mainly on summarising what they consider to be the most important events of the short story. They do this either by following the order in which events are presented in the short story, that is the *sujet* (Genette, 1980), or they synthesise. The latter method shows a deeper understanding of textual aspects. In the following example², the student's text presents the most important events in the same order as in the short story:

² Where quotations from the students' texts are included, the translation tries to imitate the style and way of expressing things in the original. However, since the students' texts contain a lot of grammar and spelling errors, which are difficult to translate from one language into another, the tone in the translated texts is in general more neutral than in the original texts.

There was a big party on Hedge Island.
It was a very fancy island with a three-storey cottage.
Where she hoped to catch a glimpse of her father among a lot of people.

She had a younger brother and she immediately got a little bit jealous since her parents showed a lot of affection for the baby. She had always been the family's baby so she felt a little bit excluded now. She wanted her mum to return the baby to the store.

She brought baby up to the tower and carried her³ in her arms, staircase by staircase. It kept getting heavier and she had to change her grip and use the banisters to support baby several times. But finally, they reached the tower but decided to climb up on the rooftop to be seen. (SESYP:2)⁴

The story takes place in the United States, in Nantucket, 20 minutes by ferry from Yarmouth Harbor, Massachusetts. The main character is a little six-year-old girl who was a baby when her parent got divorced and her father left to live in the city. Her mother finds a new husband, Gerard, and they had a child who became the new baby. Her little brother had an Irish nanny who took care of him, sometimes this nanny comforts the little girl because she is jealous of the baby. In the text she describes how the baby behaves and she says that he cries like a banshee. One day, her mother and Gerard host a reception and she decides to go up on the roof to see if her father is there and to make sure that everyone sees her with the baby. (FRSStP:3)

These are typical examples of how the comments in the content-related domain are written. The tone is neutral, and the comments focus on details on different levels, as both the overall themes (jealousy, search for attention) and more insignificant details (the banister and the geographic location) are noticed. At the same time, it would be difficult for someone who has not read the short story to understand what it is actually about, since the three parts of the student's text omit important parts of the short story, and do not, for instance, take time lapses into consideration.

5.1.2 *The extratextual domain*

The texts in the extratextual domain do not focus on textual aspects but on the students' associations during reading; associations often related to their own experience of what happens in the short story. Both the implied divorce and the new-born baby are connected to the students' lives, and instead of writing about the short story, they write about their own feelings when experiencing these events:

I understand the girl's confusion. I myself became a big sister when I was eight and it is difficult to be young, but still not the youngest. You, or at least I, who always had been the only one getting all the attention, got jealous at the beginning, and thought that my little brother made me invisible. It is difficult to know how to behave as a big sister, not the youngest anymore, but still not a grown-up. (SESStF:8)

³ According to the short story the baby is a boy, but in this student's text the pronoun "she" is used.

⁴ Coding: SE = Swedish, FR = French, S = school in a town, L = school in a small town, Y = vocational, St = general, P = boy, F = girl.

The comments in this domain also show that the students themselves have experienced very strong feelings when reading the short story. This also means that the literary text is used as a point of departure, but the main issue is the student's literary taste. In the following example, the student focuses on her own preferences instead of the content, which, according to the criteria for this category, also indicates a focus on things other than the text:

I am a girl who likes to read strongly emotionally charged books with tears and preferably reality-based stories. That's one thing that came to my mind when reading the short story. That this is not my kind of text—I wasn't interested enough, because I like other types of books/short stories, as I wrote before. I would have wanted more depth in the text, to make the reader feel something instead of telling a little bit of the girl's thoughts. (SELStF:3)

By reading the short story, this student has come to understand her own preferences in reading, and her conclusion is that the short story is too superficial to please her. The point of departure is her own emotional response to the text, and she does not really say anything about the short story itself.

5.1.3 *The literary domain*

The texts in the literary domain focus mainly on stylistic matters, such as point of view, text structures and stylistic devices. They present these either in an everyday language, or by using literary terminology. The tone is neutral and analytical and there is little room for an opinion. The main interest is either in describing or analysing the short story from a literary perspective. In the following example, several stylistic aspects are mentioned:

I think that the point of view is internal. We are the little girl, we feel everything that she feels, but we don't feel the emotions of the other characters. We feel her emotions but at the same time, we don't know anything about her; not her name, nor her age, her school, her situation, apart from the fact that Gerard is her stepfather, mum her mother, dad her dad but not biological and baby her little brother—son of mum and Gerard. (FRLStF:2)

Another thing is the fact that the writer completely avoids mentioning any names, except the family's surname. Which is quite typical for short stories. Instead, the writer chooses to say "mum", "dad" and the Irish girl. When she describes the parents and the nanny. (SEStF:36)

The first example is a description of some stylistic aspects, such as point of view, and of what kind of information is given to the reader. The second example, an extract from a longer comment, describes one stylistic feature which the student claims is typical for short stories. As this example shows, being categorised as belonging to the literary domain does not automatically mean that there must be a literal understanding of the short story.

5.1.4 *Comparative aspects*

As Table 3 above shows, the Swedish texts are mainly content-related, whereas the French are mainly literary. It should also be noted that even though extratextual texts form the smallest domain, the Swedish texts dominate and there are very few French texts in this domain. These results may not be surprising, considering the aims of literature education in the two countries, but they can be interpreted as a clear sign of the impact of literature teaching on the students' interaction with and response to a narrative text, and thus as a sign of literary socialisation through education. Literature education in France is much influenced by the final exams. Teachers must prepare the students for the exams and provide them with the tools to succeed. In the final exams, students are expected to write a text commentary (*explication de texte*) of a classic French work, which means that literature education often focuses on close reading that explores the text in detail, and tends to take less interest in what the reader brings with them (Johansson, 2015). The framing through the curriculum is also quite strong, since it specifies a corpus of writers and works, as well as aspects to point out. The Swedish tradition of letting students' opinions and experiences constitute the base of literature education is equally visible in how the students in this study tend to leave the text behind once they have tried to establish what it is about.

These patterns of interaction with the text also have consequences for the students' comprehension and for how they act when interpreting the gaps in the text.

5.2 *Comprehension and interpretation*

The categorisation of the students' texts displays differences between the two countries regarding spontaneous reactions to the short story. To gain a deeper understanding of the consequences of reacting in separate ways, factors which increase, or hinder, comprehension are analysed, along with the kinds of interpretations that are made. Comprehension and interpretation are closely related when reading literary texts. To clarify differences in how the students make use of the narrative text to understand what it is about, the two notions have been separated in the analysis. The first section investigates different types of comprehension: lexical and cultural comprehension, mimetic comprehension, and structural comprehension (Johansson, 2015). Lexical comprehension is related to the actual understanding of words. Cultural comprehension implies that lack of general knowledge of the surrounding world might impact the understanding of a literary text (Pieper & Wieser, 2012). Mimetic comprehension refers to a strong connection to the student's own personal life and to the world outside the fictional text. Structural comprehension refers to the student's knowledge of literary conventions and how they make use of them to understand the text. The categories refer to the resources used by the students to understand parts of the text that they find

confusing. The students' use of different strategies is interpreted as reflection of how they have been socialized into responding to a literary text and does not take into account cognitive aspects, even though such aspects are also activated through some of the categories. In this study, however, such aspects are not in the centre of interest.

Five of the comments analysed in this section just say that the student has not understood the short story, as in the following examples:

I didn't understand the text (FRSYP:8)

I don't know what to write. I thought that the text was difficult to understand. The only thing that I understood was that it was about a mother and two children, a baby and a little girl. Their dad wasn't there. I didn't quite understand what happened after that. (SELYP:7)

These texts are not categorised in any of the categories of comprehension, as they lack explicit comprehension, but they are important in painting the picture of the participating upper secondary school students. They show that some students from both cultural contexts, even though they are in upper secondary school, have difficulty making meaning in a narrative text.

In other written comments, explicit reference is made to lexical issues. The lexical level is addressed explicitly more often in the French texts, which reflects an approach used in the French literature classroom:

I think that the text, despite its everyday language, is difficult to understand. (FRSStF:29)

Secondly, we can note the very short sentences. The narration is very "chopped up", as with rows 38–40, for instance. This is like a simplicity in the writing and also accompanied by a not very complex vocabulary, easy to understand. (FRSStF:5)

In relation to this short story, the lexical level seems to be the least problematic, while knowledge of cultural considerations, such as placing the events in an upper-middle-class environment, is more important for meaning making than the actual words. Several comments express difficulties in understanding individual words, but say that the fact that the short story takes place in an upper-middle-class setting helps them understand that the fabrics and furniture described in the text are of a certain quality—and thus expensive. That is, the students can draw conclusions by making use of the "clues" in the text, given that they have some cultural knowledge.

A different way of constructing comprehension is to relate to the characters as if they were real human beings, which in this study is referred to as mimetic comprehension. This can be an efficient way of increasing understanding, but only if accompanied by a positive attitude towards the characters. If, on the other hand, the characters are considered to be annoying, this is an obstacle to understanding, since the students seem incapable of separating fiction from reality:

The mother and Gerard are presented as a kind of people that I really don't like, and that's probably why I reacted. I don't understand why people are so preoccupied with looks, money and status, and think that happiness comes from that. (SELStF:1)

As shown in the example above, the student expresses difficulties in understanding the mother's and Gerard's character, which also becomes an obstacle for her further reading. The student is more focused on herself than on the story and projects her own experience onto the literary text, which in this case is not an effective way to understand the literary text in terms of the discipline of literature education.

There are two aspects of mimetic comprehension in this study—one where the students use their own experience to make meaning in the text and one where the text itself fades out in favour of the student's real life. Using real-life experience to understand a literary text can be efficient, but requires a willingness to constantly return to the text. There are also examples of written comments that combine mimetic and structural aspects, producing a better understanding.

What proves to be of greatest importance for comprehension is an understanding of structures and perspectives. Without understanding the perspective from which the story is told or who is the narrator, and without realising how flashbacks (analepsis) or flashes forward (prolepsis) work, it is difficult to understand anything at all of the plot. Some of the written comments allow us to follow how meaning is built up as the reading continues:

Another thing that messes up the beginning is the point of view. It took a while to get it and you didn't understand the meaning of the story.

Once you had understood the point of view and who told the story, I actually thought that it was quite interesting, and the text had a better flow. I could put myself in her head and understand why she did what she did. (SELStP:10)

Realising that the short story is written from a child's perspective contributes to greater understanding for the characters. There are resemblances between this text and the mimetic ones, but in this case the short story stays in focus. The following example reveals how text structures and point of view are unfamiliar notions and therefore confuse the student:

One thing that I noticed was the language. It was about a child, but the language was very mature and more "adult". The adult language was mixed with some childish expressions which was very confusing. It's understandable that the story is told by a narrator with more adult language, but I had the feeling that the nameless little girl was the narrator and then the language seems too advanced for a six-year-old. (SESStF:25)

Even though the concept of point of view is not explicitly mentioned, it is obvious that perspective is the centre of attention. Shifting perspectives and the fact that adult and childish language are mixed confuses the reader. Some of the written comments describe how text structures help them understand the text, while others describe them as confusing. The following example mentions repetitions as a disturbing element.

I noticed a constant repetition of the word "Baby", that makes us lose ourselves in the reading and the understanding of the text. [...] This text is boring when you read it, very difficult to analyse. So many things happen that the reader gets lost. The end is very thrilling. (FRLStP:4)

The next example describes a complicated sentence construction and is an example of how too strong a focus on structure can also become a hindrance for comprehension:

Very long and complicated sentences, difficult to read and follow, mixed with very short ones, sometimes without any verbs and just consisting of sounds. Some sentences are almost oral, they are written like the little girl's messy thoughts and she doesn't understand what the adults say, and she confuses us at the same time. (FRSStF:14)

The comprehension-related issues are thus, according to the present study, connected to the different aspects analysed above. They are also related to how the students interpret the gaps in the text and the text as a whole.

5.2.1 Interpretation

Interpretations in the students' texts are of two different kinds: micro and macro. Micro interpretation involves interpreting the gaps in the text and there are two different strategies for doing this: close reading or guessing. In both cases, micro interpretations are a means for better comprehension, but, not surprisingly, a close reading leads to less misreading than does guessing. More Swedish students use the guessing strategy, particularly when dealing with the implicit. Where the short story provides a lot of information, this is used as a basis for interpretation, but that same strategy is not used to understand the implicit. There are several gaps in the short story, for instance the role of the girl's father and Gerard. In some of the written comments the interpretations are quite far from a literal reading and display how the students have not used the only auxiliary at hand, i.e., the short story, as in the following example:

The mother is having an affair with Gerard and it's a lie that the father is out sailing. She only says that to protect the children. (SELYP:6)

In other comments, the tone is reasoning and questioning, and they allow us to follow how the interpretations are made in close relation to the text.

I didn't understand whether the father was the dad of both children or just the girl. It felt as if the parents were divorced and the mother had a relationship with Gerard. But at the same time this isn't said in the text. It just says that the father was away this summer. Or was the mother having an affair? (SELStP:1)

Even though there are many questions and guessing in this example, the reasoning is built upon the insight that not everything is explicit. There are traces of close reading, as the comment refers to the short story and what is written. The short story is used in the search for confirmation of a feeling. At the same time, the student who wrote the text does not make use of the explicit: it is said in the short story that "dad" is not the baby's father.

Macro interpretations are interpretations of the short story as a whole—a search for a theme, motives, a symbolism or sometimes a message. Such interpretations are quite rare, especially the search for a message. From a comparative perspective,

the macro interpretations in the Swedish texts are more autonomous and imaginative than those in the French. This can be interpreted in two ways: as a lack of close reading which supports the interpretation, or as allowing the imagination to help form an understanding of a literary text, which can be efficient, as long as the reader doesn't stray too far away from a literal reading. The following two texts are examples of macro interpretation:

This situation with a "forgotten" child is a fact in the real world. Maybe the text wants to reveal that. (FRSStF:19)

I thought about the message. That the girl in the short story hasn't received much attention from her mother throughout the years, that she seeks attention from her father. I think that the message is that you should cherish your family and spend time together. (SELYF:4)

The complex process of interpreting must take several aspects into consideration: content, form and context. This means that reading must activate both a superficial and a deep reading. A strategy used in the present study is to use what you understand to interpret more complex parts of the text, which means that there is a constant movement between comprehension and interpretation during reading.

5.2.2 *Comparative aspects*

What emerges from the results reported here is that there are several differences between Swedish and French students in how comprehension is built up. The most significant is that mimetic aspects, with one exception, only exist in the Swedish corpus. Structural aspects are frequent in both corpuses, but for the French students a strong focus on details might be a hindrance for comprehension. In the Swedish corpus the gaps (Iser, 1978) and the point of view are more problematic. Fewer Swedish than French students practise close reading, that is go back to the short story to see what is written on the lines. The analysis of the corpus emphasises the importance of close reading for increasing comprehension. In addition, more literary conceptual tools are used in the French texts than in the Swedish ones, and the concepts used are also more advanced. The knowledge of concepts does not automatically lead to better understanding or better analysis, but there are in fact more elaborated literary analyses, with relevant interpretations, among the French texts. It thus seems as if the French scholarly-like readings are more efficient when it comes to comprehension in this particular context, where the only available tool is the short story itself. In a school context, where teachers and peers are available, it is however likely that a more open-minded interpreting strategy would be just as successful. The risk of losing sight of the text still exists in such a situation if the literature teacher is not attentive to that.

6. CURRICULUM FOR L1 LITERATURE EDUCATION IN SWEDEN

Since the collection of the empirical material presented in part 1 of this study, the Swedish curriculum has changed. As shown above, students educated during the period of the former curriculum (1994–2011) were socialised into a personal rather than an analytical approach to literary texts, had difficulties in understanding a complex narrative text and a tendency to leave the text behind. The following analysis investigates which aspects of literature reading are highlighted in the present curriculum for the subject Swedish. The analysis is then connected to the previously presented results on literary socialisation.

According to the first sentence of the curriculum, “[t]he core of Swedish as a subject is language and literature” (SNAE, 2011). The introduction points out that the main purpose of literature education is to allow students “to become familiar with the surrounding world, their fellow human beings and themselves”. The main aim of literature reading in upper secondary school thus seems to be to get to know oneself and others through literature and to gain a better understanding of the world outside of fiction, a goal that puts the personal, experience-based reading at the centre. The aims of the subject are summarised in a bullet list that, interestingly, paints a slightly different picture. Three out of the nine bullets are about literature:

- 5) Knowledge of key Swedish and international literary works and authors, and the ability to put these into a context.
- 6) Knowledge of genres as well as narrative techniques and stylistic features in fiction from different periods, both in film and in other media.
- 7) The ability to read, work with and reflect on fiction from different periods and cultures written by both women and men, and also produce their own texts based on what they have read. (SNAE, 2011)

According to the list, the aim is to familiarise the students with important authors and their work, and with tools for analysing fiction of different forms. The introduction and the description of the subject focus on personal development, while the summarising bullet list is more oriented towards knowledge *of* literature. These two aspects of literature education are also present in the core content and are given significance through the knowledge requirements.

The importance of choosing both male and female authors is underpinned in all the courses and can be seen as a guideline for the teachers’ choices of works. It should be noted that the bullet list implies that some authorships are more important than others, but nowhere in the curriculum are these specified. It is up to each individual teacher to decide the literary texts for each group of students and thus to interpret the reference to “key” authors and works.

The core content of each course is presented in the form of bullet lists. The bullet list for “Swedish 1”, the only course that is mandatory for all upper secondary school students, consists of nine bullets, two of which explicitly mention literature:

- Fiction, written by both men and women, from different periods and cultures.
- Key themes, narrative techniques and common stylistic features in fictional narratives, such as in literature and the theatre, and film and other media (SNAE, 2011, Official English translation)

The students are supposed to meet both new and old literature of different forms but mainly in the genre of narrative texts, and gain knowledge of some basic narrative stylistic features. According to the knowledge requirements for grade E⁵, the students should be able to “give an overview of the content of some major Swedish and international works of fiction and other narratives” and give “in basic terms an account of some of the connections between different works by giving examples of common themes and ideas”. For grade A, the students shall, in addition, “also reflect on content and form using some narrative techniques and stylistic terms” and express their own thoughts on themes and ideas and relate them to “what is universally human”. It should be noted that knowledge requirements have a great impact on teachers’ planning, which means that there is a risk that literature education within this specific course is reduced to producing summaries of works, at least for students reaching grade E. As shown in part 1 of the paper, Swedish students’ texts were mainly content-related and the present curriculum seems to consider summaries fundamental to measuring students’ understanding of a literary text. Knowledge requirements seem to promote a descriptive reading rather than an in-depth analysis, although the use of some relevant concepts is required for higher grades.

The core content of the course “Swedish 2” consists of six bullets. Two are on literature and the first of these is quite extensive:

- Swedish and international authors, both women and men, and literary works, which also covers the theatre and film, and other media, from different periods and epochs. Danish and Norwegian literature, partly in their original languages. The relationship between fiction and societal development, i.e., how fiction has been formed by conditions and ideas in society, and how it has affected societal development.
- Literary devices. Key literary concepts and their use.

Compared to “Swedish 1”, the core content of “Swedish 2” specifies more genres and adds Danish and Norwegian literature. It also adds contextualisation of literary works, which in practice often means study of literary history. The second bullet is short and says nothing about which concepts are to be studied. According to the knowledge requirements, the concepts are to be used in the analysis of literary texts, but what is promoted is knowledge of literary periods and literary concepts. Contextualisation is important and the key concepts are to be *described*, not used as tools for analysis.

The course “Swedish 3” has six bullets, one of which is about literature:

⁵ Students are graded on a six-grade scale A–F, A being the highest grade. F = fail.

- Literary texts, authored by both women and men, in the genres of prose, poetry and drama. A literary analysis of stylistic devices and narrative techniques. Key concepts and tools of literary history.

Compared to the two previous courses the word “genre” is explicit, and the terms prose, poetry and drama are used. This can be understood as a way to add a more scientific approach to literature education. The analytical approach is also underpinned by the knowledge requirements, which stipulate (for grade A) that “[s]tudents can make an in-depth and detailed, accurate and balanced literary text analysis of a theme, a genre or an author’s work from a number of different perspectives”.

Looking at the core content of all three courses, students’ own experience in relation to literature education—which is underpinned in the introduction—is toned down in favour of summaries, literary analysis and the description and use of literary concepts. The core content contains knowledge in and of literature, and the courses Swedish 2 and 3 also contain knowledge and use of literary conceptual tools. The introduction of literary concepts is a change of focus that is not research-based (Johansson & Martinsson, 2020), but can be explained by an analytical shift within the subject. The progression between the courses can be described as an increasingly scientific approach to the literary text.

Before 2011, it is fair to say that the Swedish system was related to the integrated code. The classification was in a way strong, but teachers and schools were also encouraged to work in projects across subject boundaries. Thus, the framing was weak. The 2011 curriculum for Swedish can be considered an attempt to provide the subject with a stronger framing. There has always been a strong classification of subjects in Swedish upper secondary school, but the 2011 curriculum also provides a stronger framing, mainly through the grading system. In a way, this can be understood as an effort to approach the collection code-based subjects, as opposed to the former curriculum from 1994. Even though the Swedish current system can be placed somewhere in between the collection and integrated codes, the framing is still quite weak in comparison to the French curriculum (cf. Ministère de l’Éducation nationale et de la Jeunesse, 2019). Within each subject, the teacher is free to choose authorships, works and methods. They can also choose to work across subject boundaries if they wish. There is little control from policymakers over what happens in the actual literature classroom. Studies have shown that, in practice, the control system is mainly the knowledge requirements (Lundström et al., 2011). The national tests are less decisive than the French *baccalauréat* and thus provide a weaker framing. This raises questions about the relationship between the aim, core content and knowledge requirements, since the emotional and experience-related issues are not mentioned at all in the knowledge requirements. If teachers tend to construct their literature education around knowledge requirements alone, there is an obvious risk that these issues are toned down, since they are not easily measurable in comparison with definitions of key concepts or knowledge of epochs.

Even though the framing is weak regarding core content, it is strengthened through the knowledge requirements.

7. CONCLUDING REMARKS AND DISCUSSION

Part 1 of the study has shown that literary socialisation through education does have an impact on the way that the students interact with the literary text and how they communicate about it.

When educated in a system inspired by structuralism and formalism—a system that rewards paradigmatic reading, such as the French—the students' interaction with the literary text is focused mainly on structures and techniques. This is not very surprising, but one important result is the extent to which a focus on stylistic aspects leads to close readings of the literary text, which is helpful for understanding the plot or, for instance, the point of view. When educated in a system like the Swedish one before 2011, the students' interaction with the literary text gives free rein to their imagination. Sometimes it is difficult to find their interpretations reasonable in relation to a literal reading, but the emotional readings reveal an engagement with both the characters and the events. The emotional, engaged reader is mostly absent in the French students' written comments. Moreover, the French system leads to students who stay within the constraints that the discipline of literary education determines. They do not provide any autonomous readings and seldom make interpretations of deeper meanings. Although the study has found many examples of literary analyses that demonstrate profound comprehension and reasonable interpretations of the short story, the French way of dealing with literary texts does not automatically result in a better understanding. There are several examples of French texts that consist of enumerations of stylistic devices, after which the student says that he or she has not understood what the story is about. Knowledge requirements in the present Swedish curriculum may lead in the same direction, since they promote the definition of concepts rather than the use of them in analysis.

The French system has, for a long time, related to the collection code, with a strong classification and a strong framing: a firm anchoring within the subject and with examinations as a control system. The differences in the results can be interpreted in the light of educational traditions and what is considered valuable cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1977). Within the French cultural sphere, knowledge about French literature is important cultural capital, a fact that is also and underscored in literature education. Knowledge about the canonised literature is important for the educated citizen, which is also reflected in the curriculum (Ministère de l'Éducation nationale et de la Jeunesse, 2019). Cultural capital in the Swedish context does not derive from knowledge about the fine arts to the same extent as in France, which can explain the stronger focus on the *reader*, at the cost of the literary text. The Swedish system traditionally relates to the integrated code, with an openness towards interdisciplinary aspects, which results in less focus on the literature itself. The differences between Swedish and French students' reception of

and position towards the literary text are thus a consequence of cultural, historical and system-related reasons.

The present Swedish curriculum takes steps towards the collection code, through stronger subject-oriented content and through knowledge requirements that act as a control system and framing of teaching (Johansson & Martinsson, 2020). In the Swedish curriculum from 1994 there was a lack of analytic and cognitive challenges related to literature education, and a stronger focus on these aspects is positive, if the personal and experience-based reading are kept and used to strengthen the students' interaction with the text. There has definitely been a shift in the Swedish curriculum, which is shown by part 2 of this study, from a strong syntagmatic point of departure towards more paradigmatic thinking, thanks to the literary analysis highlighted in the core content. I would not go so far as to call it a paradigmatic shift (that would be to contradict the aims of the subject), but the direction is clear. In a way, the Swedish curriculum has more similarities with the French curriculum today than when the study in part 1 of the article took place, but there are still important differences, especially regarding the framing, where the French curriculum is still more within the collection code, with a specified programme for teachers to follow and final exams that provide a strong controlling function. Regarding syntagmatic and paradigmatic reading, there are many similarities: in both countries syntagmatic reading is underpinned, but knowledge requirements and final exams tend to counteract reading for pleasure, as they only reward paradigmatic readings (Johansson, 2015).

According to the present Swedish curriculum, literature education is supposed to activate both paradigmatic and syntagmatic approaches to the literary text, a goal that chimes well with the findings presented in part 1 of this article. The present Swedish curriculum has the potential to activate the aspects missing according to the study described in part 1 of this article. By stressing the importance of reading for pleasure and the intention to awaken the students' willingness to read, in combination with an analytical, scientific approach, it should be possible to educate students who work with intellectual as well as emotional aspects when reading and studying literature. However, as stated above, knowledge requirements collide with these aspects and therefore there is an obvious risk that they are toned down in favour of what is measurable. The "measurable fiction reader" as a concept has been investigated by Lundström et al. (2011) in the syllabus for lower secondary school. They conclude that the reader's contribution to the text gets lost in the urge to clarify aspects that can be measured. Opening the way for negotiation and students' perspectives makes it more difficult to measure and therefore formal features of the literary texts are foregrounded at the expense of openness and exploration. Analysing the knowledge requirements for upper secondary school raises questions about the role of the reader in upper secondary school as well. Education does contain an element of grading that is difficult to avoid and when curricula promote syntagmatic thinking and reading in the subject description, it must be included in examination and knowledge requirements for teachers and students to prioritise it.

The question of how to measure experience-based reading—if that is really a path we want to follow—has not yet been solved.

Although curricula stake out the route and manifest the intention of policymakers, many aspects interplay within literature education, such as traditions and teachers' beliefs. There are strengths and weaknesses within different contexts and one important conclusion is that literature education in different countries has a lot to learn from each other. The inclusion of emotional reactions and connections to everyday life must be expanded to allow for a more analytic approach, to prevent students from getting lost when leaving the text behind. The French tradition of close reading is beneficial for the students' comprehension of the literary text, but it could benefit from more experience-based readings, to prevent reading from getting too technical and to avoid falling into the enumeration of literary concepts without deeper meaning. The current Swedish curriculum can be seen as an attempt to unite paradigmatic and syntagmatic thinking, but as the analysis above has shown, the strong framing provided by knowledge requirements risks entailing too abrupt a pivot towards the paradigmatic, within which the strengths of personal, experience-based readings get lost. Todorov saw warning signs already in 2007:

Le chemin dans lequel est engagé aujourd'hui l'enseignement littéraire, qui tourne le dos à cet horizon (« cette semaine on a étudié la métonymie, la semaine prochaine on passe à la personnification »), risque, lui, de nous conduire dans une impasse—sans parler de ce qu'il pourra difficilement aboutir à un amour de la littérature. (Todorov 2007, p. 25)⁶

The most important result of the study is that to succeed in creating skilled literary readers, that put both emotions and analysis into reading, literature education must live up to the high ambitions of the curricula: to combine reading for pleasure with literary analysis and close readings. A good level of reading comprehension is one of the key competences in society today, where we are constantly surrounded by different types of texts. Increasing students' reading skills can be achieved in literature education if the students get the opportunity to develop as readers on many different levels. Literature education, no matter where it takes place, needs both sense and sensibility to truly develop students' abilities and to meet the increasing lack of interest in reading. One implication of this study is the need for a discussion about the purposes of reading fiction and literary texts in school. The paradox of literature education lies in the collision between reading for pleasure—which is related to reading outside of school—and reading for education and to learn about literature. As Nordberg's (2017) study shows, students draw a clear line between school reading and free-time reading and find reading in school meaningless. Literature education must thus contain elements from reading outside of school but also provide other aspects, to help students develop as readers. The

⁶ *The road taken by literature education today, which turns its back on this horizon (this week we study metonymy, next week we turn to personification) risks leading us into an impasse—not to mention that it probably does not lead to a passion for literature. (My translation)*

challenge for the literature teacher is to provide these elements without taking away the interest of reading. Nordberg suggests that literature education provides “opportunities to discuss and study how literary forms of expression can create these effects and how they differ from other types of text and media” (Nordberg, 2017, p. 264). Even though this suggestion does not tell the teacher *how* to address literary analysis and reading for pleasure, it is an important mindset, and a good starting point for fruitful discussions on how to deal with this paradox.

Teaching students their cultural heritage, and modern and popular literature, provides them with many possible choices. Teaching them literary analysis also provides them with tools for handling different text genres and with possibilities to go deeper into the text. Through a combination of reading for pleasure, comprehension and analysis, they will be prepared to become readers, even after leaving school. As shown by this paper, it is crucial that literature education succeeds in activating both syntagmatic and paradigmatic reading. For most people, the main reasons for reading fiction are escapism, enriching imagination, personal development and immersing oneself in an imaginary world. What literature education can provide is an opportunity to discuss the students’ reception of the text and help them see how knowledge of literary analysis and close readings can contribute to a renewed experience.

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