

# LITERATURE—A HIGH RISK IMPLEMENTATION ROUTE TO LITERACY?

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## Abstract

This article is about the implementation of a literary module in a large scale Swedish professional development programme for teachers called the Reading Lift, which was introduced in 2014 in response to alarming PISA results. While the government-assigned preparatory work stressed the importance of literature and literary didactic methods, this area was reduced significantly in the hands of the National Agency for Education. For upper secondary school, the Agency did not initially plan for any literary content. This article examines what happened when L1 teachers demanded a literary module. Specifically, we study how the module was implemented and how literature is viewed. The study is based on interviews with researchers who contributed with content on behalf of the Agency and qualitative content analysis of the literature module. Results show that the module represents a focus on knowledge and art, unlike the instrumental and skills focused perspectives on literature for compulsory school, explored in an earlier study. One explanation for this, is that the influence of street-level agency bureaucrats was reduced due to various circumstances. The result was to the benefit of literary education but at the same time a high-risk route for the Agency's requirements for measurability.

Keywords: Teaching literature, L1, Implementation, Literacy, Global assessments

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Yes, the stories were dangerous, she was right. A book is a magic carpet that flies you off elsewhere. A book is a door. You open it. You step through. Do you come back?

Jeanette Winterson, *Why be Happy When You Could be Normal* (2011).

## 1. INTRODUCTION

This article is about the implementation of literary content in a large-scale professional development program for teachers called the Reading Lift, which was introduced by the Swedish Government in 2013 in response to alarming results showing how Swedish students' reading skills had declined in the world-renowned international PIRLS and PISA surveys and an overall decline in reading habits (Mullis, 2007; 2012; OECD, 2004; 2007; 2010; The Swedish National Agency for Education, 2010). The first step was taken in 2011 with the appointment of a governmentally established committee that was given the task to analyse the position of reading, including the conditions for the book market (Dir. 2011:24). Its final report, *The Culture of Reading*, was presented in September 2012 and, amongst other things, proposed a professional development programme primarily focused on strengthening teachers' knowledge "on children's and youth literature, as well as literature didactics methods" (SOU, 2012: 65, pp. 13–14). In the following government bill, *Reading for Life*, leading up to the programme's construction, it was also suggested that reading literature (in this article corresponding to literary texts or fiction, see below) would form a substantial part (Prop 2013/14:3, p. 40). The Swedish National Agency was given the responsibility for the overall planning and outlining of the Reading Lift programme, whilst researchers contributed with content.

However, when implemented by the Swedish National Agency for Education the space reserved for reading literary texts in the Reading Lift was reduced significantly compared to the intentions expressed in the preparatory work. For example, just one module out of 15 was retained for fiction for compulsory school, ages 10–15 (Erixon & Löfgren, 2020). In this module, literature is seen as one text amongst others, chiefly to be used for skills training of generalised reading strategies. Further, literary texts are considered to have low epistemological value since they are not based on fact (Erixon & Löfgren, 2020). This reduced stance harmonises well with views on literature expressed by the OECD PISA framework (2019), where literary texts are described as one of many "narration type texts" written "for readers' personal enjoyment and appreciation" and thus "classified as being of a personal situation" – i.e. without further bearing on, or use for social life (pp. 46, 48; Borsgård, 2021, pp. 124–125).

For upper secondary school (ages 16–18), the National Agency for Education did not initially plan for a literature module. When L1 teachers involved in the programme issued complaints about this, the Agency decided to meet the teachers' requests (see Results 6). The time frame for developing this module was, however, limited, which influenced both the process, for example time frame for contributing researchers, and the way literature was viewed. The aim of this study is to examine

the implementation process of the literary module “Perspectives on literature education” for upper secondary school (ages 16–18), as well as the role that is given to literature in this module. This aim is broken down into three research questions:

- 1) How did the participating researchers experience the construction of the literary module?
- 2) What role is given to literature in the module?
- 3) How can we understand the implementation process of this module?

In so doing, this study locates itself in the field of research occupied with epistemological changes in L1, partly due to the increased emphasis on the assessment of more instrumental reading and writing skills brought on, amongst others, by the world-renowned international PISA surveys; often leading to a more reduced position for literary texts in L1 as well as a narrowing perspective on its purpose and use (Pieper, 2020; Simões & Cosson, 2020).

This article is based on interviews with researchers who planned and wrote texts for the literature module for upper secondary school, and text analysis of that module. In this study, *literature* (or *literary texts*) refers to writing as an art form (in Swedish *skönlitteratur*). The term encompasses all main forms of literary activity: prose, drama and poetry. In other words, we do not use literature in its more general meaning as a written work. Especially the first two genres, prose and drama, but to some extent also poetry (particularly in its traditional form), often takes on fictional form (imaginary creative work). Since literature, literary and *fiction* are closely related, the terms are used interchangeably while referring to texts that motivate what Rosenblatt (1938/1995) calls aesthetic reading (pp. 32–33).

## 2. CONTEXT

### 2.1 *The Reading Lift*

Reading Lift materials in the form of professional development modules was constructed for all levels of the Swedish school system: i.e. preschool (ages 1–5), compulsory school (ages 6–15) and upper secondary school (ages 16–18). Collegial learning was set as the overall pedagogical model of the programme. Each Reading Lift module contains 8 submodules. A submodule is made up of four sections: (1) a written article, 10–12 pages, often complimented by a short instructional film or podcast; (2) instructions for collegial discussion and lesson planning; (3) implementation of teaching activity; and (4) collegial follow-up of teaching activity.

Between the years 2015 and 2020, the Reading Lift have reached about 25 percent of teachers in Sweden (Dnr 2020:351). Schools were able to apply to the Agency for state grants, covering the cost of a mentoring supervisor. These were then trained by the National Agency (nine days) and thereafter given the responsibility to lead and mentor a collegial learning group consisting of 6–8 teachers, studying at least two modules at the local school (Carlbaum et al. 2019). In order to qualify, the

mentoring supervisor must be a trained L1 teacher (or equivalent) and have teaching experience amounting to at least four years.

A module takes about half a school year to complete and the program stipulates that collegial learning groups should meet with their supervisor every week to discuss their progress with the assignments at hand. Since the Reading Lift is openly available on the National Agency for Education's website, the Learning Portal (<https://larportalen.skolverket.se/#/>), schools or individual teachers can also partake without receiving funding. In 2019 the Reading Lift programme was renamed to Language, reading- and writing development (the Reading Lift), the former term will be used while referring to the programme in this study due to its more succinct form.

## 2.2 *The Swedish school*

In Sweden and other Nordic countries, the state has traditionally played the main role in creating educational policies. The model that first took shape in the initial decades after the Second World War is often called the Nordic social democratic project (Ofstedal Telhaug et al., 2006). Kivinen & Rinne (1998) identify it as “the social-democratic super-ideology” (p. 45) based on increasing welfare, democratic education, and educational expansion. During the “radical left” turn of the 1970s, the comprehensive Swedish school system was further extended, despite conservative or coalition governments coming into power from time to time.

In the 1990s, this ideology undermined and the monopoly status held by the Swedish Ministry of Education over decisions on educational policies challenged. In the era of globalisation and new public management at the end of the millennium, powers on the right of the political spectrum, partly in association with the social democrats, began to formulate a new neoliberal order characterised by privatisation of schools, emphasis on employability and global measurability (Arnesen & Lundahl, 2006). Priorities were now based on an ideology that saw human beings chiefly as clients or consumers, and not as citizens, expressed in words like “profit”, “efficiency”, “standards”, “quality”, “skills” and “product”. Equality and solidarity, ideals that characterised the previous system, partly gave way to values that focus on the individual, emphasising the advancement of skills, hard work and theoretical achievements (Kivinen & Rinne, 1998).

In harmony with this development, the central state altered its focus on governing to a more evaluation-based discourse with a greater emphasis on assessment, monitoring and inspection at both individual and system levels. The curriculum and the assessment system were brought more in line, leading to knowledge and skills emphasised by the international comparative tests being given a much more prominent position in national curriculum, as well as in assessment and evaluation systems (Carlgren & Klette, 2008; Pettersson et al., 2017).

Also, consistent with other international trends in educational policy (Caena, 2014; Hansson & Erixon, 2019) the Swedish Education Act in 2010 (SFS 2010:800) placed substantially higher academic demands on teachers in Swedish schools,

asserting that education at all levels should “rest on scientific grounds and proven experience” (5§). At the same time as this formulation was handed over to teachers and school leaders to interpret and translate, the National Agency for Education, stated that “scientific grounds and proven experience” was comparable to evidence-based teaching (The Swedish National Agency for Education, 2013, p. 12).

### 2.3 *The school subject Swedish L1*

The L1 school subject of Swedish was historically part of the national project. As in many countries literature enjoyed a prominent role within L1 and was seen as a special manifestation through which the younger generation could be taught to love their language and culture (Piper, 2020, p. 116; Thavenius, 1981). The importance of literature in Sweden was shown by the fact that as far back as the 1980s secondary school students received two grades in the L1 subject, one for language and the other for literature. Further, these grades were inscribed at the top of the grading document (Elmfeldt, 2014; Thavenius, 1981; 1991;).

The Nordic school systems and L1 subjects have long entailed protected discourses with educational traditions justified by democratic values and Bildung-ideals. However, the L1 subjects today face challenging paradoxes and contradictions. The traditional Bildung goals of schooling – and of the L1 subjects in particular – are being contested and are in flux (Ringarp, 2013; Krogh, 2020). Due to increased influence from the global assessments, in the last 10–15 years, a dramatic shift has been seen in goals, general tasks and in the conceptualisation of subject content in Sweden and other Nordic countries (Krogh & Penne, 2015). This has led to a pragmatic turn in which the development of general (and easily measured) reading and writing skills is now at the forefront of the L1 subjects (Krogh, 2012; Ongstad, 2015; Sjöstedt, 2013). For example, reading strategies, also increasingly emphasised by the OECD educational frameworks (Borsgård, 2021, p. 123; OECD, 2019, p. 24), are since 2011 accentuated as central content in the Swedish course syllabus for L1 for most levels of the Swedish school system.

In the most recent Swedish syllabus for upper secondary school (Lgr11), aims and goals related to the area of literature are reduced to measurable knowledge requirements, focusing on knowledge about literary texts rather than on what one can experience and learn through literature (Lundström et al., 2011). Like in many other countries, this shift is in line with an increased focus on assessment. As Lundström et al. (2011) conclude, the full potential of literature reading is not utilised. It is easier to measure what students can know *about* literature, i.e. the formal aspects, than interpretative aspects or what they have learned *through* literature. Further, Ewald (2015), Graeske (2015) and Wintersparv (2021) note how the focus on skills has displaced aesthetic issues and literary experience while reading.

Another discourse that brings new challenges to L1 is the emphasis on all teachers' role in literacy development, regardless of subject or specialisation (Green, 2002, p. 1). This perspective is also enhanced by the global literacy measurements

frameworks, especially PISA, with its very broad understanding of literacy as a multiple and social practice, rather than as an autonomous field that can be reduced to one discipline (Sellar & Lindgard, 2015, p. 19). In accordance with this expansion of the literacy concept, the Reading Lift was constructed to support literacy across the curriculum, in opposition to the Government's instruction that the programme be aimed "primarily at L1 teachers" (Dnr. U2013/7215/S, p. 1).

### 3. PREVIOUS RESEARCH ON PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND THE READING LIFT

Research shows that professional development programmes can be effective in improving teachers' competencies as well as students' results (Barber & Mourshed, 2007; Mourshed et al., 2010). Yet, in order to achieve substantial impact programme design must be carefully thought through (Timperley et al., 2007). The Reading Lift is built on collegial learning, which is supported by many international research studies and meta-studies as being part of a successful structure for teachers' professional development (Carlisle, 2011; Creemers & Reezigt, 1997; Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Hattie, 2009). Still, according to Timberley et al. (2007), professional development must also be grounded in teachers' own recognised needs. This first step is vital, to be followed by consulting external expertise, independent trials of teaching models and joint follow-up and evaluation. The last three steps in Timberley's model are present in the construction of the Reading Lift, although the first step, as noted by both Randal (2017) and Kirsten & Wermke (2017), is missing. As such, the Reading Lift can be described as a bureaucracy-centred model of professional development, which are implemented from above and are often motivated by a need for control on state level, serving systems of measurement and benchmarking (Talbert 2010). These can be divaricated from teacher centred models, which are based on teachers' own interests and initiatives. The management-based efforts can, according to Talbert, be sensed by teachers, leading them to distrust the programme (Talbert 2010).

Previous research on the Reading Lift shows that marginalised new knowledge was gained by teachers in collegial learning groups, partly due to the vast epistemological gaps between the presented materials and the participating teachers (Johansson & Magnusson, 2019; Randahl & Varga, 2020; Varga, 2017). In a study of group conversations, Kirsten (2020) demonstrates how the programme mainly functions as a form of policy implementation, although the collegial learning groups allows for some resistance and difference in ideas. Kirsten has also (2019) studied how subject teachers (other than L1) related to the programme, with the findings showing that the literacy-acquired content was used as "add on" teaching activities rather than becoming embedded in the ordinary subject instruction. Danielsson et al., (2019) has, however, shown that teachers actively entered into a dialogue with presented materials and that the different parts of the content were applied depending on student group and teaching situation.

Finally, Erixon & Löfgren (2018; 2020) has studied the role of democracy and the use of literature in the Reading Lift for compulsory school stages 4–9 (ages 10–15). The results show a crooked line between the initial Bildung-inspired proposal, the government bill and the final government instruction to the National Agency for Education. For each phase (initial report, government bill and instruction), the space for reading literature as well as emphasis on democracy was decreased (2018). The view on fiction for compulsory school is largely instrumental (Erixon & Löfgren 2020). Literature is regarded as one of several other text genres that may be used to develop students' generalised reading and writing skills and terms like art or aesthetic are never used while describing literary texts. Especially reading strategies based on Palinscar & Brown's (1984) reciprocal method are emphasised. However, reading with the displayed strategies presents as a technical and fragmented process, whereby the student is supposed to constantly pause and apply different strategies: for example, summarise, search for gaps (Iser's *Lerstellen*) or formulate questions, as well as to track their own progress with the strategies at hand. Literary works are also described as complicated structures, hard to enter and difficult to understand, and fiction is assigned low epistemological value, as it is not based on facts. Some attention is also directed to identifying formal aspects of literary texts like narrator perspective, style and genre. The relationship between these key elements and their cultural and historical context is, however, rarely discussed, nor is the relationship between form and content, i.e. a process that involves interpretation.

#### 4. THEORY

When we analyse how the participating researchers experienced the implementation process of the literary module, we rely on the bottom-up perspective of the *street-level bureaucrat* concept developed by Michael Lipsky (1980). Within the field of implementation research, the *policy step* or the linear view of policy or decision cycle model has long been prevalent (Löfgren, 2012; Premfors, 1989). It is based on a hierarchical view according to which upper levels in a hierarchy, e.g. a government, initiate and make decisions while lower levels routinely implement the decisions. However, in Lipsky's view (1980), local street-bureaucrats are thought to have great influence on the design of a policy. Winter & Lehmann Nielsen (2008) state these opportunities depend, among other things, on local bureaucrats' close contacts with the users and their control over the implementation process. In a decentralised country like Sweden, with small government offices and in contrast large autonomous state agencies (Hall, 2016, p. 301), the manoeuvring space for street-level bureaucrats is especially wide.

Fundamental theoretical starting points for our analysis of the role of literature in the literary module are Green's (1988, 2002) three interrelated dimensions of literacy: the operational, cultural and critical as well as Witte & Sâmihãian's (2013) systematisation of curricular aspects for literary education: cultural, linguistic (aesthetic awareness), social and personal growth. Green's *operational* dimension

concerns individuals being able to read and write in a range of contexts in an appropriate and adequate manner. This is to focus on the skill-based aspect of literacy. The *cultural* dimension involves what may be called the meaning aspect of literacy, which combines language learning with a cultural understanding of literacy. The third dimension of literacy, the *critical*, similarly has to do with the social construction of knowledge and the notion of schooling as socialisation. A critical perspective on literacy recognises that these are not and cannot be neutral concepts. The literate individual is someone who knows that there is more than one version available, and that what one is reading represents both a selection and an abstraction from a larger context. Green's categories do not stand in a hierarchical position to one another; rather they should, ideally, build on each other and work together as interrelated dimensions of literacy (Green, 2002). Witte & Sâmihăian's (2013) taxonomy for understanding the role of literature in pedagogical contexts is based on a broad range of international studies on formal curricula (Piper, 2020) and consists of four paradigms: cultural, linguistic (aesthetic awareness), social, and personal growth. All concepts with their theoretical background are described in more detail under Methods.

In order to contextualise the Reading Lift and understand the choices available and those actually made, we locate the Reading Lift in the Swedish school system that for many years has been influenced by neoliberal ideas and new public management (Almqvist, 2006), with a strong focus on evaluation and review, i.e. what Michael Power (1997) calls the audit-society and Peter Dahler-Larsen (2012) the evaluation society. Pasi Sahlberg (2016) refers to this development as the *global education reform movement* and identifies five interrelated and distinct features: (1) the standardisation of education; (2) a focus on core subjects; (3) applicants for low-risk routes to achieve the goals; (4) the use of business management models; and (5) test-based accountability (Sahlberg, 2016).

## 5. METHODS

This article is based on two types of data: (1) interviews with six out of ten researchers who on behalf of the National Agency for Education has planned and written texts for the literature module for upper secondary school, and (2) text analysis of that module. Participating researchers not interviewed were: one who left the project at an early stage, and three, of which two co-wrote submodules with participants already interviewed.

The interviews were semi-structured, entailing certain thematic areas to allow flexibility to rephrase questions or to vary the order they follow based on the interview situation (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2014). Both article writers participated in the first interview. Remaining interviews were divided between the two. A potential consequence of this division of labor is for example that certain follow-up questions and responses may vary. Conducted individually and mainly focused on the advent and organisation of the literature module, including the writing process, the interviews inquired into how the researchers first came to know about the Reading Lift, how



they were contacted, what kind of instructions they had been given, forms of collaboration etc. (Appendix 1: Interview questions). Each interview lasted 30 to 50 minutes. The following six participants (pseudonyms are used) were interviewed (Table 1):

*Table 1. Interviewed researchers*

researcher	date of interview	profession/field	affiliation
Anna	26 October 2018	Assistant professor/literature didactics	University A
John	26 October 2018	Professor/literature didactics	University A
Mark	17 September 2018	Professor/comparative literature and literature didactics	University B
Mary	8 April 2019	Associate professor/literature didactics	University C
Peter	17 October 2018	Professor /comparative literature	University D
Susan	22 November 2018	Professor/pedagogy	University A

Two of these six interviewed researchers participated in a start-up meeting for the literary module with the National Agency for Education: John, a professor of literature didactics and Mark, a professor of both comparative literature and literature didactics. When the framework for the project was established Anna, an assistant professor of literature didactics, Susan, a professor in pedagogy with a didactic interest in fiction, drama and film and Peter, a professor of comparative literature as well as Mary, an associate professor of literature didactics, were recruited along with four other researchers (not included in the study) into the group. In total, researchers from four universities, located in different parts of Sweden, collaborated on the project.

The conducted interviews were transcribed and analysed qualitatively (Bergström & Boréus, 2005; Kohler Riessman, 2008). First, the transcripts were read using an inductive approach in order to obtain an overall understanding of the content. Second, the interviews were analysed systematically, with attention being paid to the advent, organisation and construction of the module, i.e. how the researchers had understood and experienced this process. During this phase, the material was further sequenced based on the content, for example descriptions on how the researchers came to know about the Reading Lift, initial contact with The National Agency for Education, the Agency's collaboration, writing and response process etc. Transcripts were also coded by speaker to enable comparisons between utterances made by different actors in the subsequent analysis. Finally, the content was reduced, analysed and summarised in order for conclusions to be drawn.

While examining the professional development module "Perspectives on literary education", we consider the Anglo-Saxon research stream called critical text analysis (e.g. Fowler, 1991; Fairclough, 1992). In this tradition, attention is often paid to ideological texts like political texts, advertising, and mass media texts for the purpose of showing how they can form part of a hidden or open power exercise (Karlsson, 2010). A critical text analysis usually involves three steps. In the first reading, a kind of spontaneous understanding of the text's content emerges; in the second, the

structure and content of the text is categorised so as to be analysed and critically examined in the third step (Hultén, 2000, pp. 96–97). We also make use of content analysis. Cohen et al. (2007) outline the process of content analysis in four basic steps: coding, categorising, comparing and concluding. Yet, this procedure is seldom completed in a single session; instead, codes and categories are first tried out on a smaller portion of the material so as to assess accuracy and consistency and then revised and repeated for as many steps as it takes to achieve high reliability (Sándorová, 2014, p. 99; Weber, 1990).

Accordingly, all eight training submodules making up the literature module were first read with a view to obtain an overall understanding of the content, focusing especially on the role of fiction. A preliminary coding of content based on views on fiction was also undertaken, during which we also kept the results from our previous study on compulsory school stages 4–9 in mind (Erixon & Löfgren, 2020). In the second step, analysis categories for ways of viewing literature in a didactical context were designed based on theory, previous studies of the Reading Lift and our initial coding (Erixon & Löfgren, 2018; 2020). The analysis framework was refined in several rounds of organising and amassing the units into categories, reformulating categories, and comparing the formed categories. Finally, in the third step, the submodules were read once again for the purpose of more thoroughly map perceptions on literature in the eight submodules according to the developed framework. The analysis categories are:

(1) Our first category, *skills and metacognition*, represents a primary linguistic discourse focused on language development and skill training, for example: word acquisition, reading comprehension, decoding and symbolic/multimodal competence (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996), but also development of reading strategies as well as training of metacognitive learning awareness. The category of skills and metacognition is synonymous with Green's first level of literacy, the operational, that mainly concentrates on developing literacy skills, i.e. to read and write adequately (Green, 1988).

(2) Our second category, *art form*, incorporates cultural literacy and aesthetic awareness and is, as such, a combination of Witte & Sâmihăian's (2013) *cultural* and *linguistic* paradigms. The former term refers to cultural literacy (literary history, epochs), and the latter to form-based aesthetic awareness (style, genre and text structure). This category is also closely related to Green's second level, the *cultural*, which combines language learning with a cultural understanding of literacy (Green, 1988). To summarize, artistic form and traditions are central to this category where literary texts and style are analysed, interpreted and understood historically and culturally (Abbs, 2003, pp. 56–58).

(3) In our third category, *form of knowledge*, fiction is seen as an expression from which knowledge (episteme) but also specific kinds of skills (techne) and practical wisdom (phronesis) can be derived (Saugstad, 2006). This category incorporates Witte and Sâmihăian's (2013) *social* paradigm of teaching literature, meaning societal awareness (ideological and political). Closely related to Witte and Sâmihăian's

social category, is the tradition of critical literacy, represented by Paulo Freire and Hilary Janks (Freire, 1993, Janks, 2009; see also Green 2 *the critical*), where the main aim is to advance student's awareness of power-structures and social injustices, as well as to develop ability to influence those conditions (Freire, 1993). Within literature as a form of knowledge, reading of fiction is also considered to promote knowledge about existential issues, morals and ethics (also enfolded in Witte & Sâmihäian's social category), as well as empathy and understanding of others (Nussbaum 2010). Also included are Felski's (2008) categories of *knowledge*, meaning insights of new cultures, perspectives and places, and *shock*, referring to, for example, values and contexts that may be genuinely uncomfortable. Literature's ability to enhance acquisition of skills for further learning and societal use, like critical or analytical thinking, creativity and imagination (Abbs, 1982; Dart, 2001; Nussbaum, 2010; Said, 2004, pp. 63–64); as well as more cognitive aspects such as concentration, memory and abstract thinking, is also denoted.

(4) Our fourth category, the *personal*, builds on Witte & Sâmihäian's personal growth paradigm, which centres around individual readers' personal growth and experience whilst reading literary texts, i.e. psychological and emotional development, identity formation, maturity and aesthetic response. Felski's (2008) category of *recognition*, referring to literary experiences and situations that readers fully or partially recognise, is also enclosed, as well as the kind of all-encompassing, often pleasure-based personalised reading or aesthetic experience that fully captivates its audience, or what the literary researcher Rita Felski calls *enchantment* (2008).

## 6. RESULTS

### 6.1 *The interview study*

In this section, the results of the interview study are presented, starting with the researchers' first impressions, before moving on to how the module was constructed.

Most researchers participating in our study directly related to reading fiction when they first heard about the Reading Lift. Accordingly, many had expected that the field of literary didactics would become a substantial part of the programme. Mark reflects: "The coming Reading Lift was fiction for me. Here, as literary academic scholars, we would, in some ways, get to be involved quite a lot with the programme." With her own background and teacher experience, Anna, connected the Reading Lift with the need for subject-oriented continuing education for mother-tongue teachers. Another researcher, John, remembered being somewhat sceptical and even slightly cynical when first hearing of the programme. He regarded it as "another Literacy project", and "not of interest to us since I thought this was about skills".

The Swedish government tradition of investigation requires that an inquiry be conducted and presented in a government bill, with a SOU report being sent out for

those who will be affected by a coming decision to consult. This is an important step regarding possible changes to a proposal before it is implemented. Yet, none of the researchers we interviewed had been involved in this process as regards the SOU report *Reading for Life* (Prop 2013/14:3). Without having examined the matter any closer, Mark thinks it was the language department at his university that was involved in the consultation process. This seems to have been the case at several universities and might indicate that L1 Swedish, as a school subject, is now more closely associated with the field of linguistics and subsequently has been distanced from the scientific basis of comparative literature. In this way, the universities have come to take greater account of the language department's view of literacy, instead of the that of the literary department.

### 6.2 *The start and organisation of the literature module in the Reading Lift*

The dominance of language studies in the literacy paradigm may partly explain why the National Agency for Education did not initially intend to offer a module on literature reading for upper secondary school. It was not until the teachers taking part in the first trial of the programme actually demanded such a module that the Agency decided to meet the teachers' requests (see below).

According to the interviewees, a call was sent out to both literature scholars and others engaged in the didactics of literature at Swedish universities, welcoming those with an interest in participating to a meeting with the National Agency for Education. The invitation was neutral in tone, impersonalized and did not reveal the somewhat constrained circumstances the conference initiators seemed to find themselves in. At the meeting, the scholars were told by the Agency representatives that the Reading Lift did not contain any module with literary content, but that they had now decided to include such a module due to urgent requests made by teachers. John, one of the researchers who attended the meeting, explains:

Yes, the Reading Lift was very much focused on reading and then, from my perspective, technical reading, decoding, and writing and such, and literature was overlooked [...], and then they [civil servants at The National Agency for Education] had received enquiries from teachers who wondered why it was not included. So, I think they had forgotten or suddenly realized that literature must be included [...]. (John)

The researchers were surprised about the lack of content on literary texts:

We were really surprised – almost shocked. Further, it [constructing a literary didactic module about fiction] should happen pretty quickly also because the time before launching the module was short. (Mark)

The meeting seemed slightly unprepared. John, Mark as well as a colleague of Peter found it arbitrary and unstructured. It was also clear that the officials were in a hurry. John describes pressure on the schedule as “immense”. The participating researchers' astonishment was mixed with the insight that the “street-level bureaucrats” (Lipsky 1980) found themselves in an inverted power relationship, whereby

the researchers had an advantage over the bureaucrats in that they were able to solve a problem for them. These conditions affected how the literature module was constructed. Anna compared her experience while working with the literary module with her previous experience with a module for teachers in compulsory school, in which the bureaucrats held the normal power position; “there were more negotiations, discussions, re-writings and such”:

[...] you had to adapt quite a bit to a certain way of expressing yourself, a certain format. And there was some control, sometimes in detail, that could be a bit frustrating. [...] Actually, I think that in this module about literature we had more freedom than in the others that I had previously been working on. (Anna)

John, recalled another colleague who had been involved in construction of the Reading Lift for compulsory school and therefore felt hesitant to collaborate with the National Agency: “[...] and I had seen her effort and the frustration and so on that she had experienced, and at the same time I felt it was about time that a literature module was constructed”.

The module was thus extradited to the researchers’ own area of interest and expertise, if anything at all was to be done. This meant the participants were able to freely choose a theme for their contribution without Agency’s interference. Susan, for example, chose to build upon her previous dissertation conducted many years ago:

As I remember it, I thoroughly enjoyed the process. It was great to finally be able to . . . I had in addition written a popular science book [...] this was very close to “ah, but now this will work together”, I felt very strongly that this was part of my collaboration work. (Susan)

An editorial base through which all produced texts were further processed was set up at one of the higher education institutions. A scientific leader and an editor were also appointed. Contributing scholars had a start-up meeting in which representatives of the National Agency did not partake. The editor and scientific leader together with Agency officials read and reviewed all of the written submissions. Common editorial remarks were suggestions on how to better adapt the texts to the target group. This could include making the text less theoretical and more concrete and including more examples of how the presented literature didactic models and ideas were to be applied in the classroom. One scholar remembered the National Agency requesting that certain “buzzwords” be used. Still, the researchers controlled the main part of the writing process in which those more experienced in the field were able to help those less experienced.

During the interviews, the researchers also exhibited awareness of, in their opinion, the increasingly reduced role of literature in L1 in favour of more easily measured skills, partly due to the national emphasis on assessment and benchmarking brought on, amongst others, by the world-renowned OECD PISA services. In the interference with this, they expressed a strong belief in the importance of fiction for educational purposes; not just for developing reading and writing skills according to

our first analysis category (skills and metacognition), but also because they believe reading and discussing fiction can develop aesthetic awareness (art form), creativity, imagination, analytical skills and widen perspectives concerning awareness on life and society (form of knowledge). John, for example, even claims that fiction can “make you re-evaluate your whole perception of the world”, which shows a substantial belief in art for acquiring knowledge and developing a critical perspective:

To read something that suddenly makes you see things in a different way or perceive oneself or others in a different way, and this is the thing that can't be measured. But I think that these elements should be part of education as well. (John)

All in all, we find that the participating literary researchers – at a late stage – were given the opportunity to compile a literary module, based on their own interests and expertise. The time for this was limited and the plan unstructured but, partly due to this, the scholars were given greater freedom in deciding upon the content as well as greater control over the writing and revision process.

### *6.3 The module study*

In this section, we examine the role played by literature in Reading Lift literature module for upper secondary school “Perspectives on literature education”.

On the whole, the Reading Lift materials for teachers in upper secondary school consists of 12 modules. In terms of scope, fiction has a very restricted space in the programme; in just one of the 12 modules (8%). Interestingly, the space for the further education of L1 (Swedish) teachers is also relatively limited, despite the Government's mandate for the Swedish National Agency for Education stating that the initiative should chiefly “include L1-teachers in compulsory and in the first year of upper secondary school” (Prop 2013/7215/5, p. 3). The proportion of training modules specifically developed for teachers of Swedish is two out of 12 (17%), one of which is the literary module itself.

As it follows, the result section is structured according to our main analysis categories, starting with the least frequently represented perspectives on literature in the upper secondary school literature module, skills and metacognition and the personal. Thereafter more commonly addressed views, represented in most submodules and dominant in many, are addressed, i.e. an art form and a form of knowledge. The section ends with a more in-dept analysis of views on reading fiction, and especially the role of desire-based reading, in the upper-secondary school module.

### *6.4 Skills and metacognition*

Starting with the linguistic- and skills-centred approach, we find that for the most part this perspective is only vaguely discernible in the literary module. Besides some general reference to the potential of reading fiction for language acquisition as well as reading comprehension, in the introductory submodule “1. Why we read fiction”,

not much else is made of this perspective. One exception is multimodal competence, i.e. the ability to understand and analyse different meaning-making modes whether they be images, films or sounds. Two of the submodules encompassed within the literary module, “4. Intermediality” and “8. School reading and leisure use”, are occupied with how art and fiction can be mediated and understood through different mediums. Although not a main focus, within this material generalised multimodal or symbolic competence is mentioned as a beneficial byproduct of this kind of literary analysis.

### *6.5 The personal*

Less addressed is also literature’s ability to enhance personal transformation in line with our fourth category, the personal. Two submodules, however, briefly touch on the fact that reading fiction can contribute to personal growth: “1. Why we read fiction” and “2. Choosing texts”. In the latter submodule, Felski’s (2008) conception of recognition, i.e. the reader feels “addressed, summoned, called to account” and recognises something of his or herself in the story (p. 23), is introduced as central principle for why readers engage with, as well as develop through, literary texts. Somewhat more important, however, is the kind of personalised desire-based aesthetic experience, i.e. Rita Felski’s (2008) enchantment, which is advanced in three of the eight submodules (1; 6; 8); albeit not as a means in itself, or for the sole purpose of reading promotion; but, as we describe below, as the key to both learning (knowledge) and literary understanding (art form).

### *6.6 An artform*

More prominent than the linguistic-skills-centred approach or the personal one, are perspectives on fiction as an art form. Contrary to the literature module for compulsory school, featured in our previous research (Erixon & Löfgren 2020), in the module for upper secondary school literature is actually referred to as art. For example, the main aim of submodule “4. Intermediality”, is presented as to explore the connections between “literary and other works of art” (p. 1). Literary history and artistic traditions are also central. For example, submodule “3. Literary-historical Narrative”, thematises ways to teach and create an understanding of the complexities of literary history. In addition, submodule “8. School reading and leisure use” is occupied with how modern-day fan fiction and film adaptations, through desire-based aspects, can serve as an entry point to classic literary texts.

Further, five out of eight submodules focus on various ways to strengthen the understanding and interpretation of literary works (submodules 4; 5; 6; 7; 8). Compared to the literary module for compulsory school, featured in our previous study (Erixon & Löfgren 2020), in the module for upper-secondary school the relationship between aesthetic form and content (interpretation) as well its cultural and/or historic context, is much more at the forefront of the analysis process, rather than a

sole focus on recognising form-based aspects. Further, in submodule 2 and 6, the desire-based reading experience, is seen as a central component to both interpretation of literary works of art and for the acquisition of knowledge (see also 6.7 and 6.8).

### *6.7 A form of knowledge*

Most noticeable in the module on fiction is an understanding of literature as a form of knowledge, in line with our third analysis category. This perspective is often combined with perspectives on fiction as an art form, either giving equal emphasis to both aspects or a stronger stress of the knowledge-based perception. For example, the introductory submodule “1. Why we read fiction”, affords multiple reasons as to why literature is important from an epistemological standpoint: to provide new perspectives, understanding of the world, ethics and morals, empathy, critical thinking, imagination, and democratic competence. Further, the reading of fiction is assumed to sharpen abstract thinking as well as intellectual ability.

Submodule “2. Choosing texts”, discusses principles for literary text selection in relation to curriculum goals such as “cultural heritage”, “knowledge” and “joy” (The Swedish National Agency for Education, 2011, pp. 9–10). Central to the argumentation around knowledge, is literary scholar Rita Felski’s (2008) categories for how fiction develops readers through knowledge and shock, but also through enchantment. The two former categories, reflect a view of fiction as a potential form of knowledge and skills; either about new situations, perspectives and cultures, (knowledge), or about uncomfortable thoughts, experiences and contexts (shock). Further, although the concept of enchantment is placed in the personal category, in the theoretical framework for this particular study (See Methods 4), the Reading Lift submodule 2 contends that enchantment holds a strong didactic potential, since desire is a prerequisite for learning. The submodule also problematizes the, often assumed (especially amongst literary scholars), preconception of desire-based reading, by necessity, leading to an uncritical approach. It is argued, that on the contrary, emotional impact and engagement can often strengthen both intellect and understanding of literary works of art.

The view of literature as a form of knowledge is also demonstrated in the same submodule while discussing literature’s potential to promote awareness of power structures in line with Green’s (1988) third level of literacy, the critical. Argument is made that a choice of literary texts based on power-analysis and principles of diversity, increases students’ chances of developing these abilities while processing fiction. Submodule “7. Conversations around literature”, which is occupied with literature peer discussion, also highlights the importance of fiction for analytical skills. Here, too, fiction is seen as a special form of knowledge holding a democratic potential.

A similar view of fiction as a form of knowledge, that when correctly read, analysed and used can promote awareness of social and cultural conditions, as well as



critical perspectives and democratic awareness, can also be found in “6. Shadowing the plot”. Here, references are made to psychological research on the importance of storytelling for readers’ ability to understand and create meaning. A fictional text offers a perspective on life and society, and through this perspective readers can see and understand their world in a new way. This section also refers to the American philosopher Martha Nussbaum (2010), who stresses the democratic potential of fiction through its promotion of empathetic ability and understanding of experiences other than one’s own. Although not a main focus, this submodule also touches upon literature’s ability to develop more cognitive functions such as concentration, memory and abstract thinking.

#### *6.8 Reading based on wholeness and devotion*

Under 6.5–6.7, we find that the all-encompassing pleasure-based reading experience (Felski’s concept of enchantment), in the literary module for upper secondary school, is valued not just for its abilities to stimulate the individual reading experience (the personal), but also for its potential to further develop knowledge and intellect, as well as a better understanding of literary texts. This approach is further developed in submodule 6 “Shadowing the plot”. Here, a method for the reading of fiction is presented, which radically differs from the reading techniques based on Palinscar & Brown (1984) reciprocal teaching, promoted in the compulsory school module (Erixon & Löfgren, 2020). The approach can be regarded as an alternative proposal for a reading strategy that, in contrast to the fragmented and technically-oriented tactics of the compulsory school module, is based on wholeness, devotion and dialogue. Components for the method derive from various sources, like the literature researchers J. Hillis Miller (2002) and Peter Brooks (1984).

In this approach, students must first do an individual and imaginative reading of the literary work. Analysis and discussion of the literary work can then follow, individually and in groups. In the analysis, students are instructed to concentrate on following and analysing the story’s plot, as well as “the structure of the meanings that develop over the temporal course of the story” (pp. 5–7). Reading for the plot is more than just summarising the story. Above all, it is about following and understanding why different things happen in the story (interpretation), which leads to knowledge of the story’s purpose or message.

In this method, it is vital that the initial reading, as supported by the literature researcher J. Hillis Miller (2002), occurs undisturbed without distance and reservations. The all-encompassing imaginative approach, similar to Felski’s (2008) enchantment, is absolutely central because it not only promotes reading enthusiasm but also because it, through emotional engagement, connects the reader with the novel’s characters and events, and thereby increases the ability to understand both the story (art form), other perspectives and, as such, the world (knowledge). Another feature characterising this method is its emphasis on reading literary texts from beginning to end. Support here comes from the Russian linguist and the literary historian

Bakhtin's theories of dialogicity and his view of texts being utterances in a constantly ongoing dialogue (Bakhtin, 1981). In order for students to be able to analyse, understand and perhaps even respond to the opinion constituted by a fictional text, the entire statement must be considered.

In submodule "Shadowing the plot", as well as in several other submodules for upper secondary school, reading and understanding of fictional texts, including the imaginative process, is seen as a natural process, where the students are largely already competent, leaving the teacher more in the role of a guide than as someone who can provide all the answers. This stands in stark contrast to the literary Reading Lift material developed for compulsory school, where literary texts are seen as challenging to enter and difficult to understand, due both to the involvement of the imagination, but also due to obstacles in the form of difficult words and unknown cultures and places (Erixon & Löfgren, 2020). Admittedly, difficulties for reading and interpretation are touched upon, in the literary module for upper secondary school, especially in submodule: "5. Literary understanding and use of concepts". In fact, several hindrances in the form of interpretative gaps (*Isers herstellen*), difficult words, lack of external knowledge, and lack of ability to distinguish between fiction and reality is addressed. However, the presented obstructions do not appear to be a major problem. Instead, they are described as something the teacher can easily handle with the use of dictionaries and via everyday literature conversations with the students about the literary text:

As mentioned above, some of these problems are probably quite easy to fix by leading the students back into the text and examining what it actually, literally, says and what is not interpretable or negotiable. (Submodule 5: "Literary understanding and use of concepts", p. 6)

## 7. CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION OF THE RESULTS

Concerning the *first research question*, i.e., "How did the participating researchers experience the construction of the literary module?", we find that most researchers, when they first heard about the Reading Lift-programme, believed it was related to reading fiction. At the first meeting about the literary module with the National Agency of Education, it was revealed that no content on literature was initially intended for teachers in upper secondary school. In fact, it was not until teachers partaking in the first trial insisted on such a module that the Agency decided to act. Due to the limited time frame, as well as the arbitrary and somewhat unstructured Agency meeting, the participating researchers found themselves in a relationship of inverted power to the street-level bureaucrats (Lipsky 1980) at the National Agency, which came to mean greater independence while constructing the professional development materials.

Concerning the *second research question*, i.e. what role is given to literature, we first of all find that literature is given a very limited role, with only one out of 12 modules reserved for reading fiction. Second, we find other perspectives on fiction

and literature reading for upper secondary school, compared to the modules for compulsory school (Erixon & Löfgren, 2020). For example, the linguistic-oriented skills perspective that characterises the literary material for compulsory school, is not prevalent. Instead, the focus is on literature as an art form and, particularly, on how literature as a form of knowledge can develop an understanding of social, cultural and existential conditions, enhance critical thinking; but also, the ability to empathise and understand others' perspectives; as well as to some extent personal development. Identifying formal aspects of literary texts is part of this process, although not a goal in itself. Instead, the focus is on interpretation of the relationship between literary form and meaning as well as on the artistic, cultural and historic contexts surrounding literary works of art. Further, more personalised aesthetic experience, especially desire-based reading (enchantment), is declared to be vital for understanding as well as, a means to promote an interest in reading.

In the module for upper secondary school, reading fiction, including the imaginary process, is conveyed as something natural and accessible where the student is seen as competent, in strong contrast with perspectives for compulsory school that literary texts are difficult to enter and understand. Reading whole texts and in an imaginary and passion-based manner is thus enhanced, compared to the more technically-driven, fragmented and arduous ways of reading fiction portrayed in the module for compulsory school.

Concerning the *third research question*, i.e. how can we understand the implementation process of the literature module, we find that the street level bureaucrats at National Agency for Education, in line with Lipsky (1980), have a substantial influence on how policy is implemented. We claim that our example highlights this conclusion in two different ways. First, when the National Agency for Education's bureaucrats have control over time and thus power to carry out their intentions. For compulsory school, as shown in an earlier study, the focus is on standardised readings and the development of reading skills in line with current global educational policy and especially the OECD PISA discourse (Erixon & Löfgren, 2020), i.e. what Kirsten (2020) refers to as policy implementation. But, second, our example with the upper secondary school module in this study also shows that the Swedish National Agency's bureaucrats can deviate from their principles and assignments when the power relationship with those who will carry out them is shifted to the researcher's advantage in this case.

We thus conclude that the shift in perspective on literature is due to the street-level bureaucrats at the National Agency for Education who, due to the poor planning, did not have opportunities to design the policy in practice in the same way as what occurred with the modules for compulsory school (Lipsky, 1980). This gave greater manoeuvring space for the researchers involved in the literature module. Altogether, this verifies Lipsky's (1980) perspective on implementation which states that local street-bureaucrats have great opportunities to design policy in practice. Moreover, we have shown that, when this influence is weaker or does not exist, it is also visible.

### 7.1 Limitations of the study

The officials involved in developing the programme at the Swedish National Agency were not interviewed, meaning we do not have their perspective on the process and the result. Moreover, there is always a risk with interviews that, in order to please, you obtain answers the interviewees think you want to hear. For example, amongst literary didactic researchers, there is sometimes a common jargon in defence of literature as opposed other to more linguistic based content in L1. Since both article writers and all, but one, of the interviewed researchers are involved in literature didactics, this perspective might have been accentuated.

### 7.2 Further analysis

In the light of both the governmentally-assigned final report, *The Culture of Reading* (SOU 2012: 65), and the government bill, *Reading for Life* (Prop 2013/14: 3), and in view of our previous findings for compulsory school, we generally find that both literature and L1 teachers are downplayed in the professional development programme the Reading Lift. One explanation for this is the more evaluation-based governing discourse in Sweden, i.e. a utilitarian perspective established in the 1980s (Van den Ven, 2006). This discourse was further developed through the Global education reform movement (Sahlberg, 2016), powered on by the street-level bureaucrats at the National Agency for Education; with a stronger emphasis on assessment, monitoring and inspection at both the individual and system level as well as a marked influence of the extended literacy concept characteristic of the OECD PISA discourse (Sellar & Lingard, 2013). All of these factors challenge the position of literature in L1. As shown in earlier studies of the Reading Lift for compulsory school, as well as in this study, this was also the impetus for the programme given that for upper secondary school literature was initially not even supposed to be part of the programme. Another explanation might be that stipulated higher academic demand on teaching in Swedish schools should be based on "evidence". This demand will contribute to a teaching approach close what Dilthey terms; *Naturwissenschaften*, which aims at generating (causal) *explanation*, and far from *Geisteswissenschaften* that seeks to generate (interpretive) *understanding* (Dilthey, 1883), with the latter being central to literary education.

In enhancing perspectives on literature as an art form and as a form of knowledge, the literary module for upper secondary school challenges some of Sahlberg's (2016) five interrelated features of the Global Education Reform Movement (GERM). Teaching literature in line with the intention of the module for upper secondary school makes it difficult to standardise the acquired knowledge and skills, i.e. the first feature identified by Sahlberg, and to test in the name of test-based accountability, i.e. the fifth feature Sahlberg identifies. In this sense, teaching literature according to the module for upper secondary school may be regarded as a more

high-risk than “a low-risk’ route to achieving standardised goals, i.e. Sahlberg’s third feature.

Tentatively, we imagine that the more desire-based approach, forwarded in the upper-secondary module, represents an older Bildung discourse (Humboldt, 1792/2000, Gustavsson, 2000) and also more of the reading for pleasure discourse described by Krashen (2004). Krashen claims that free voluntary reading is important for developing not simply literacy but also of general knowledge and thinking. It is to do with getting children “hooked on books” and reading for pleasure and meaning (Krashen, 2004: 149–150; Clark & Rumbold, 2006). In Sweden, both discourses have partly had to give way to emphasis on strategy-based learning and a more skills-based and academic literary didactic discourse in school. The former aims for surface-level understanding, separated from reading experience (Wintersparv et al., 2019), interpretation (Öhman, 2015) and pleasure (Krashen, 2004). In the latter, formal literary aspects are advanced; skills which are perhaps more easily measured than for example ability to holistically interpret literary works of art (Lundström, et al., 2011).

Questions also remains to be asked as to whether the strategies applied by the National Agency for Education, in themselves, actually can be seen as a high-risk route to literacy. If Krashen has a point, i.e. that reading extensively (primarily fiction) out of meaning and pleasure for most develop the necessarily literacy skills as well as a life-long relationship with reading and books, then reduced literary content and an overly strong focus on instrumental reading skills and strict analysis of formal aspects, might be counterproductive (Krashen, 2004). In *The Beautiful Risk of Education* (2014) Gert Biesta argues that truly meaningful education always involves an element of risk. However, current global educational policy often effectively closes off this route with its emphasis on learning (outcomes) instead of education, and with its accentuated demands on measurability (Biesta, 2014). According to Biesta, education is “not only interested in qualification and socialization but also in subjectification” (p. 139). Involving oneself, i. e. one’s subjectivity, with the unpredictability of education is, however, a risk full process. But without this risk, education dissolves and social reproduction and adaption to existing orders takes its place.

Engaging in literary studies – in fact with art in general – outside the competence-based literacy discourse presents, using the author Jeanette Winterson’s words in the introductory quote to this article, as just such a risk (“Do you come back?”) – but is perhaps one worth taking in order to strengthen literacy, as well as knowledge and skills, artistic awareness and personal growth. One might also wonder how a professional development module on reading promotion might have been designed if Sweden’s results in the PISA already was satisfactory. To which extent would literature, then have been prominent in the programme? And what views on reading and literature might then have been presented?

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## APPENDIX 1. INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Initial presentation: This interview is about the relationship between The National Agency of Education and you as a researcher in relation to your contribution to the Literary module for upper secondary school.

1. How and when did you first come hear about the Reading Lift?
2. How did you receive the assignment (literary module)?
3. Were you familiar with the Governmentally assigned preparatory work *The Culture of Reading* and *Reading for Life*?
  - If yes, did you relate to it in any way during the construction of the module?
4. What kind of instructions did you receive from the National Agency of Education?
  - Were they in written form?
5. How were the different submodules (making up the literary module) kept together?
6. How much and what kind of editorial work did the National Agency for Education do?
  - What did that look like?
7. Were you in contact with the other authors/contributing researchers during the process?
  - How much contact?
  - Did you meet to discuss common issues?
8. Who decided topics for the different submodules, i.e. what to write about?
9. What competence did the civil servants at the National Agency for Education have?
10. To your knowledge, did the academic discipline of linguistics influence the programme
  - in general, the literary module?
11. Were you warned about something during the process? (Uses of words, particular topics etc.)
12. In light of the preparatory work highlighting the need for fiction and literature didactics, why do you think literature received such a limited space in the Reading Lift?