THE OPEN WORK AND THE CLOSING READING

Navigating openness and ambiguity in literature discussions

MICHAEL TENGBERG[*], MARITHA JOHANSSON[**],
AND MARGRETHE SØNNELAND[***]

*Karlstad University, Sweden; **Linköping University, Sweden; ***University of Stavanger, Norway*

Abstract

The tension between openness and ambiguity in literature and readers' expectation of coherence and consistency (i.e., their 'desire for closure') may present a pedagogical dilemma in literature classrooms. While prior research has identified an educational potential of using open works to de-automatize students' thinking, encourage tolerance for ambiguity, and shape literary awareness, empirically-based knowledge of such classroom practice is scarce. The present study examined the interaction between structured openness of literary texts and readers' 'desire for closure' in the context of literature discussions in lower secondary school. Drawing on videotaped whole-class discussions about narratively complex short stories in an ongoing intervention to support quality of literature discussions, we identified six different *closing mechanisms* used by either the teacher or the students: 1) Forcing a one-sided interpretation; 2) Inferring new context, not given by the text, to embed already preferred interpretations; 3) Magnifying peripheral details to support interpretations; 4) Staying on the surface – concentrating on the empirically verifiable and determinate; 5) Skipping between inquiries instead of developing lines of thought; and 6) Encouraging readers to connect fictive elements to their own lives. Based on the analysis, we discuss how interactional closure of literary openness in the classroom context relates to principal educational ideals of promoting clarity, comprehension, and coherence.

Keywords: ambiguity, closing mechanisms, interpretation, literature discussions, openness

1.   INTRODUCTION

Håkan Nesser's short story "If Anything Should Happen" (2000) has a classic open ending. In the beginning of the story, the young first-person narrator is told by his/her mother that if anything should happen, s/he should call aunt Vanja. It is implied that the mother and the child has recently moved to a new flat; moving boxes are still piled up against the walls. A few clues also seem to suggest that the mother has been bruised in the face, the cause of which is, however, not revealed. After a walk around the neighborhood on his/her own, the child (i.e., the non-named first-person narrator) returns to the apartment, seemingly alone there, drinks a Coke and reads a magazine, and then falls asleep. A couple of hours later, s/he wakes up in the early twilight, still no sight of the mother. After going to the bathroom, the child decides to enter the mother's room. The final lines of the story read as follows:

> I knock carefully a couple of times, and when I don't get an answer, I press down the handle and enter. I don't stay long. I go back to the kitchen and call aunt Vanja. She lives in a town only 40 miles away and promises to be here within an hour.
>   I don't really know what to do meanwhile, so I grab a new Coke and lay down on the bed to wait.

(Nesser, 2000, p. 25)

Something has clearly happened, though the reader never learns what exactly. Is the mother in the bedroom? Is she alive? Or dead? And if something has happened, why? The story contains a number of suggestive components not fully explained by the explicit plot: an empty police car with opened doors outside the pizzeria down at the square; a bully scene at a nearly empty soccer field; a deep cut in the wooden table in their apartment, a brief memory of a brother; and the mother's bruised face. None of these suggestions, however, are explicitly connected to the ending.

Nesser's story was included in a collection of short stories distributed to several hundred upper secondary schools in Sweden in 2000. Since then, many Swedish students have been confused and provoked by the ambiguous and evocative text, complaining particularly about not learning the fate of the mother (Olin-Scheller & Tengberg, 2016; Thorson, 2005).

To teachers of literature, the tension between teenage readers' expectation of coherence and consistency on the one hand, and the open structure of many modern literary texts on the other, represents a classic pedagogical dilemma. How should a teacher maneuver when the students' expectations of closure are negated by the text, and a felt sensation of being disrupted or bewildered in the reading process unfolds? Teaching literature is inevitably about fostering a tolerance (maybe even an appetite) for the semiotics of uncertainty (Blau, 2003; McKenzie & Bender, 2021). This is not merely about aesthetic sensibility, but also about capacity for dealing with multiple interpretations and uncertainty as a form of critical thinking and life skill in a dialogic and complex world. But how does this ideal rhyme with an educational ambition of supporting knowledge as comprehension and certainty? And by what sort of pedagogical scaffolding can teachers help students to embrace openness, and

accustom them to dwelling on open-ended problems rather than hastening towards determinate solutions through inferences and interpretations that creates coherence and consistency? This study examines some of the challenges faced in classroom interaction about open, or ambiguous, literary texts. More specifically, we analyze and identify interactional mechanisms that seem to push the discussion towards closure instead of creating more room for exploration of interpretive openness.

Comprehension of a story necessitates a reconstruction of the relationship between situation, events and mood (Kintsch 1998; Oatley, 1999), which, in turn, requires a reader to arrive at some level of coherence and closure. Without a traceable common thread to knit the different events and scenes of a narrative together, interpretation must be suspended. And since school readings are usually associated with expectations of displaying one's comprehension, rather than with acknowledging uncertainty and suspended judgment, students have reasons to perceive the act of closing gaps in the text as a required, or at least a customary, task to be performed during literature instruction (Rabinowitz & Bancroft, 2014).

In a 1989 Reading-to-Write report, Kathleen McCormick used the term 'desire for closure' to designate a reader's, or a writer's, explicit longing for having everything in a text fall into place, i.e., to avert ambiguity and alternative understandings, and find coherent and consistent solutions to problems. When students deliberately avoid complexity, and seek strategies to explain away ambiguity or confusion, they submit to the desire for closure. As McCormick pointed out, the educational system often "values closure over exploration" (p. 8) through task definitions, assessment, and more generally through epistemic ideologies. Cognitive and literary theorist Reuven Tsur has suggested that the desire for reading ahead and skipping difficulties ("low-categorized information") is merely a natural cognitive process, developed for effective purposes. Such cognitive process "permits the greatest economy of perceptive effort", he argues (2008, p. 4).

In the present paper, we examine the interaction between structured openness of literary texts and readers' 'desire for closure' in the context of literature discussions in lower secondary school. We explore what students and teachers do with the nature of openness in literature, i.e., how they respond to it, how they interact with each other in response to it, and, specifically, the interactional mechanisms by which openness of the text is often closed as a result of the collective reading. Based on this analysis, we discuss how closure of literary openness in the classroom context relates to the significant educational ideals of comprehension and coherence. Specifically, narrative reading in the classroom often takes comprehension of plot, of character motives and actions etc. as legitimate goals for students' learning and experience of reading (Nissen et al., 2021). However, a rich experience of literature also involves sensing the unpredictable, the paradoxical, and to perceive that consistency is dependent on perspective and identification, and that literature calls coherent understandings into question, rather than sustains them.

1.1 Openness and ambiguity in the classroom

When we employ the concept of openness (and ambiguity) in this study, we lean specifically on Umberto Eco's (1989) definition of *open works*. Openness, thus, constitutes a lack of propositional determinacy within the fictional universe, and a potential of multiple meanings provided for by the text. As such, it serves as a functional component for setting the reader's interactive and interpretive engagement in play. The implicit structure of relations between determinacies and indeterminacies is described in more detail by Wolfgang Iser (1978). The simultaneous challenge and pedagogical potential of using openness and ambiguity of literature in the classroom has been indicated by several researchers, from the widely supported ideal of authentic and open-ended teacher questions (Nystrand, 1997; Wilkinson et al., 2015) to promotion of de-automatized thinking in interpretation (Koek et al., 2019), and of using works that are in themselves open in terms of structure and meaning (Campbell, 2018; Sønneland, 2019). Generally, however, empirical studies of using openness and ambiguity in the classroom are scarce, while various theoretical accounts, pleading for the pedagogical benefits of including ambiguous text in literature instruction, are numerous. The latter often find strong arguments for engaging with literary ambiguity as a way of supporting students' critical thinking (Blau, 2003; Campbell, 2018), social and democratic sensitivity (McKenzie & Bender, 2021; Thyberg, 2012), and personal empowerment (McKenzie & Bender, 2021; Scholes, 1985). Campbell (2018) proposes a poetics of openness as an intrinsic pedagogical value, offering a flexible framework for a broader education of interpretation, not only of texts, but of cultures, sign systems, and discourses of many genres.

Empirical studies by Thyberg (2012) and Miall (2015) emphasize ambiguity's role in shaping linguistic and literary awareness, and sensitizing readers to the literary form of aesthetic experience. Levine et al. (2022) and Clark and Graves (2008) explore the impact of teacher questioning and instructional approaches on students' engagement with ambiguity, advocating for authentic, curiosity-driven questions (Levine et al., 2022), and open and directed text mediation (Clark & Graves, 2008). Recently, small-scale interventionist research have begun to investigate the pedagogical prerequisites for challenging young readers' interpretive expectations by purposeful use of distinctly ambiguous literary text (Johansen, 2017, 2022; Sønneland, 2019). Sønneland (2019) emphasizes the role of the reader in creating meaning in open texts, and the importance of formulating interpretive problems for classroom discussion as open-ended problems. Drawing on Derrida's concept of *undecidability*, Johansen (2022) has suggested some principles of an *undecidability didactics*. In this context, undecidability refers to a semiotic relationship in which meaning and interpretation are palpably undermined by the presence of several conceivable but incongruent interpretive solutions. Rather than to encourage specific interpretations, Johansen argues that teachers should promote sustained curiosity and inquiry in students' engagement with open works and try to delay

closure (p. 10). In a study using Kafka's short text "Before the law" in a sixth-grade classroom, Johansen concludes that even if all students in the study may not have appreciated nor understood what they were reading, none of them experienced it as trivial or irrelevant (Johansen, 2017). In fact, Johansen's point is that all literature – read in school or elsewhere – must not necessarily be *understood*. Sometimes the contact with something bewildering, and a rich experience of *defamiliarization* (in Shklovsky's [1917] 1988 sense), is just as powerful, necessary, and rewarding (Johansen, 2017).

While ambiguity is a crucial disciplinary practice of literary studies (Rainey, 2017; Wilder, 2002), students in compulsory school seldom report of engaging with ambiguity in literature lessons (Chick et al., 2009). Additionally, despite the widespread enthusiasm for the promises of utilizing literary ambiguity in the classroom, few studies have explored the pedagogical challenges awaiting teachers who dare the feat. We simply know too little of teachers' real classroom encounters with open works, and especially of the interactional mechanisms that may be averting teachers and students from fulfilling the theoretically defined potentials of these texts. For this reason, the current study examines some specific challenges of collaborative classroom interpretation of open works, particularly the interaction between structured openness of the literary text and readers' 'desire for closure'.

2. METHOD

The study draws on data collected during an intervention study, designed for improving the quality of teacher-led, whole-class discussions about complex literary texts. As part of the intervention, 8th grade teachers participated in a two-day training module on Inquiry Dialogue (Wilkinson et al, 2017), which is a model of discussion emphasizing collaborative exploration of central interpretive issues in texts (Tengberg et al., 2023). Then, over the course of the year, six short stories and two picture books were read and discussed in each classroom, using Inquiry Dialogue. Researchers and teacher colleagues observed four of these discussions and gave targeted feedback to support teacher facilitation of discussions. In addition, we asked the teachers to videorecord two of the non-observed whole-class discussions. These videos (N = 30) constitute the data for the present study. For a more detailed description of the intervention study design, see Tengberg et al. (under review).

2.1 Participants

Nineteen teachers and their 25 8th grade classes participated in the study. Four teachers taught more than one class, and one class was taught by two teachers in tandem. The teachers' work experience differed widely, ranging from less than a year of experience to 25 years of teaching experience (*M* = 15.2 yrs). Similarly, teachers' age and qualifications differed (see Table 1). While these data are not

addressed in the analysis, they reveal that the teacher sample was diverse, and that most of the teachers were quite experienced.

Participating classrooms came from eight different schools in seven different communities in the south of Sweden. All schools were public schools situated in communities that ranged from small town (approx. 10.000 inhab.) to city (approx. 200.000 inhab.). Class sizes ranged from 17 to 27, with an average of 22.4 students per class.

All classrooms (teachers and students) volunteered to participate after invitation from the research group. All participants and legal guardians of students under 15 signed informed consent.

Table 1. Teacher participants

Gender		Age					Qualification in subject (ECTS)				
Female	Male	20–29	30–39	40–49	50–59	60+	No ed.	0–30	31–60	61–90	90+
17	2	1	5	6	6	1	1	0	5	6	4

2.2 Text selection

The texts used in the discussions belong to a selection of short stories compiled by the research group (see full list at the end). We chose texts with the explicit intention of using openness and *narrative complexity* to generate friction in reading and set off an experience of defamiliarization in students. The chosen works were thus assumed to produce *tension* (McCormick, 1994) or disturbance (Shklovsky, 1917; Tsur, 2008) with the 8th grade readers' repertoires in that they would experience the presence of substantial openness, or significant gaps (Iser, 1978), in the composition. Texts chosen should also be short enough to be able to be read and discussed in a single lesson.[1]

Narrative complexity is a proposed theoretical term for foregrounded elements and openness in narrative text that cause, or is expected to cause, friction and defamiliarization in the reading process. It relates either to aspects of aesthetics, such as narrative style, discontinuities of the plot, and open endings, or to aspects of context and theme, such as emotionally disturbing events, shocking images or actions, or genuine ethical dilemmas (see Tengberg et al., 2023 for elaboration).

2.3 Data

Data for the study consists of 30 videotaped whole-class literature discussions. The videos normally contained a recording of the whole lesson, including introductory

---

[1] This did not stop the teachers from working on the texts over several lessons by reading, re-reading, writing and then talking about the texts.

talk by the teacher, reading the story aloud, and sometimes preparatory think-writing or group talk. In the present study, however, we focus solely on the whole-class discussion sections of the tapes. All excerpts used in the article have been translated from Swedish into English, including a slight moderation to a more neutral written language style.

2.4 Analytic strategy

The analysis should not be seen as an overall assessment of the quality of the teachers' facilitation of classroom literature discussions. Neither is it an analysis of the quality with which these teachers generally treat openness in the texts they read and discuss with their students.[2] Rather, we try to identify interactive mechanisms that (intentionally or unintentionally) pushed the discussion towards closure instead of creating more room for exploration of interpretive openness. These mechanisms were sometimes propelled by the students, and sometimes by the teacher. In neither case, however, should the mechanisms identified be thought of as representative of what these classes and their teachers did in general when they discussed complex short stories. Over the course of the intervention, several of the teachers developed strong strategic and methodical repertoires for getting their students to consider uncertainties in the text and not being too hasty in judgment (Tengberg et al., under review). Instead, we have tried to understand why an explorative and inquiry mode of talking about the texts was sometimes thwarted or at least curbed. For this reason, we cast light on moments of interaction in which the literary text offered a rhetorical address open to several interpretations, but where the readers (either teacher or students) rather responded to it by seeking coherence and consistency through concretization of gaps and negation of openness (Iser, 1978). We identify these moments as *closing mechanisms*.

The analytic work proceeded in three successive steps, guided by an inductive approach akin to approaches used in both grounded theory (Thornberg & Charmaz, 2014) and qualitative content analysis (Schreier, 2012). Conceptual foci such as narrative complexity, openness, and closing of gaps geared the researchers' attention toward certain passages of interaction that were of specific interest to the analysis. Step 1 consisted of a general level compilation and preliminary coding of potential analytic categories. Step 2 consisted of exclusion, grouping, categorization, and analytic definition of detected closing mechanisms. Finally, in step 3, selected excerpts from what had been coded as belonging to either of the identified mechanisms, were analyzed in detail as examples of interaction between the literary text, the instructional context, and the participants of the discussion.

In the Findings section, we present and discuss each of the six mechanisms identified. We ask the reader to bear in mind that these mechanisms do not

---

[2] For an overall assessment of the quality of discussions, and of the effects of the intervention, see Tengberg et al. (under review).

represent a conclusive list of potential similar interactive processes. Rather, they represent a first step of trying to map the terrain of how readers' desire for closure operates in classroom discussions about open works, and what teachers could possibly do to handle, or suspend, a little bit of that desire, in order to encourage an explorative attitude in students collaborative work, and, in the longer run, foster a tolerance for openness and ambiguity.

3.   FINDINGS

We identified six types of closing mechanisms: 1) *Forcing a one-sided interpretation*; 2) *Inferring new context, not given by the text, to embed already preferred interpretations*; 3) *Magnifying peripheral details to support interpretations*; 4) *Staying on the surface – concentrating on the empirically verifiable and determinate; 5) Skipping between inquiries instead of developing lines of thought;* and *6) Encouraging readers to connect fictive elements to their own lives*. These six interactional mechanisms are presented, exemplified and explained below.

3.1 Forcing a one-sided interpretation

All possibilities of a story cannot be held open simultaneously. Comprehension requires a successive string of inferential determinations through which the reader generates situation models, i.e., the mental representations of events in a narrative and how they relate to each other (Kintsch, 1998; Zwaan & Radvansky, 1998). Gaps are therefore closed incessantly during the reading process. Similarly, participants of text-based discussions must arrive at some decisions as the lesson proceeds. Relating story events to each other is a typical, perhaps a main, function of many literature discussions. However, a recurring feature in some of the observed discussions was a coercing move by the teacher to have students make determinations on an interpretive level, for example to choose between alternative ways of understanding an aspect of the plot, an event, or the motivation for a character's action.

In the following excerpt, the class talks about the short story by Nesser (2000) referred to in the introduction. Because the students in the class appear shy about talking in whole class, and are comparatively very quiet, the teacher frequently switches between whole-class and small-group discussions as a means of getting students to be verbally active. As they discuss the open ending of the story, the teacher highlights the fate of the mother as a problem in need of interpretation. Several of the student groups have related the ending to the many previous, suggestive and ambiguous elements appearing in the story: the mother's bruised eye, the cut in the table, and the briefly mentioned brother. As we now enter the classroom, they are talking in whole class, and the groups report on what they have come up with so far.

Excerpt 1: 8th gr whole class talking about «If Anything Should Happen» (H. Nesser)

Teacher:	Alright, does anybody else have a thought? What about the four of you? Caus' now we have two alternatives. We don't really know, but we have a few different clues about what has happened previously anyway. Do you think she's killed herself, Josef?
Josef:	We don't know that.
Teacher:	What did you say?
Josef:	We don't know that. There's a risk that she (indiscernible)
Teacher:	Well in that case, then maybe she was still at home, right, if she killed herself? And, because you (turns to another group) said that she sent out the child, right, that it shouldn't be home at that time.
Josef:	(indiscernible)
Teacher:	Yeah, it could be something else there. So, what do you think if you have to make up your mind? What do you lean towards?
Josef:	It's possible, but not a hundred.
Teacher:	It's possible, but not a hundred. What do you think is most likely? Lukas?
Lukas:	Suicide.
Teacher:	You think suicide is the most likely.
Lukas:	Yes.
Teacher:	And what about Sigrid?
Sigrid:	Also suicide.
Teacher:	Aha, but then she was still there, right?
Sigrid:	Yeah.
(…)	
Teacher:	So, did she die? That is actually a question. (2 s) No, we don't know. But if you're not allowed to shrug. You have to make up your minds.
Ella:	I don't think so.
(…)	
Ninni:	Maybe she died at the hospital.
Teacher:	Ok! So that means that she is not at home? Do you think that the room is empty?
Many:	Yes.

As the previously presenting groups have suggested two different inferences (either that the mother has killed herself or that she simply is not in her room), the teacher approaches a group of four boys and asks them to determine which of these two suggestions they find more likely. Rather forcefully, she encourages the students to *make up their minds*. "We don't really know, but we have a few different clues" she

tells them. And despite Josef's repeated hesitation, seemingly suggesting a maintained interpretive openness on his behalf ("We don't know…"; "There's a risk…"; and "It's possible, but not a hundred"), the teacher wants him to decide ("what do you think if you have to make up your mind"). A few minutes later, she returns to this strong position of forcing the students towards a one-sided interpretation ("No, we don't know. But if you're not allowed to shrug. You have to make up your minds."). Although she keeps acknowledging that there is a lack of narrative determinacy ("we don't know"), she still wants the students to make determinate inferences, i.e., to lock the potential interpretive dynamics of the rhetoric address. The underlying pedagogical message, consequently, is that openness or ambiguity of literature is not a meaning potential in itself, but rather an obstacle to overcome.

3.2 Inferring new context, not given by the text to embed already preferred interpretations

Any literary text relies on its reader to mean something. The reader's imaginative contribution is a necessary component of the work's realization (Iser, 1978). In the Norwegian author Roy Jacobsen's short story "The Well" (2001), several loosely connected story fragments are told about different characters. Neither chronology nor spatial relationships are determined by the text. The reader must construe on his/her own whether and how these fragments and characters are related to each other.

Extensive narrative openness may cause readers to stretch far beyond the text and infer new context to embed possible explanations for the textual enigma. If forcing one-sided interpretations (mechanism 1) was primarily the teachers' doing, this mechanism is rather one bestowed by students in the discussions. In the following excerpt, we listen to a class discussing "The Well". What the excerpt exemplifies, particularly towards the end, is an attempt by the students to infer contextual elements that will explain, or situate, the loosely connected pieces of the story. At a point earlier during the discussion, the student chair of the discussion (Zara) has suggested that the whole plot might be a dream. This draws on a passage in the story where one of the characters wakes up to the ring of a clock, and where there is talk of dreams that just passed. Someone suggests that the text might be a "fantasy text", taking place in another dimension, where the characters' souls meet rather than the actual characters themselves, an inference for which there is little substantiation in the text.

Excerpt 2: 8th gr whole class talking about «The Well» (R. Jacobsen)

John: Maybe someone went into his apartment and gave him the letter and the gun. Wh- why, how would he not know the gun and the letter are there if he was going to kill himself?

Tim: Because perhaps he thought it unlikely that he had received a letter and, because, at first, he thought of killing himself. Then he realized that it's unnecessary and he didn't understand why he thought that.

Zara (chair): Okay Joni, I didn't really see-

Joni: But also, it says like this: "We wake up and ask ourselves what it was that let us dream so beautifully. Something we read in a newspaper or a book or something we may have experienced or missed for so long that it has turned into a memory." It can also lead to it being a memory or something he wished would happen and that it was really just a daydream or dream in general.

Zara (chair): Ah, that is actually true. Because anyway, you don't have to, you know, sometimes you daydream, so maybe that's what she meant.

Wilmer: But if it's a fantasy text, it's not possible that he, what do you call it, committed suicide, but then that his soul was the one still left on earth and therefore, well-

Zara (chair): -came afterwards and-

Wilmer: -yes and then went to that barstool-

Zara (chair): Was he the one who narrated everything, all the details?

Wilmer: Yes, and that her soul finds his soul in the end.

(agreements)

Zara (chair): (indiscernible), what do we think about that?

Hamid: I don't know. I mean, the whole text was so strange-

Teacher: Who was it that said – I am just thinking – because then I link back to, cause it was someone who said earlier that it takes place in heaven-

John: Yes.

Teacher: -it gets a bit spiritual then to think that this would not be on earth but actually in another dimension.

Wilmer: Are there bar stools in other dimensions?

Teacher: I haven't been there, so I don't know.

(laughter)

Zara (chair): I've been there.

Teacher: Have you been there?

Zara (chair): Yes.

The character of the dialogue is evidently explorative, and the initial statements are closely text-oriented, even quoting from the text. But Wilmer's comment about it being a "fantasy text" bridges from the idea of a dream over to the more whimsical type of proposals about souls and other dimensions. This way the conversation is soon disentangled from the openness prepared for by the complexity of Jacobsen's narrative composition, and rather open to basically any suggestion. Although the

example above is extracted from a conversation generally quite engaged both with the big mysteries of the text and with its rhetorical address, this interactional feature mostly appears in classrooms that are somewhat less orderly, less tightly orchestrated by the teacher, and less sincerely engaged with the story read. What happens is that students speculate about additional external context for which there is little or no support in the text, in order to confirm an already held, but loosely undergirded interpretation. It may seem tenuous to suggest that this move leads to closure – as the discussion is evidently open to speculation – but what this speculative idea contributes is an interpretive frame in which the contradictions of the text no longer violate the norm. In dreams and other dimensions everything is possible. Thus, it formulates a contextual background against which the plot is coherent, and the openness of the story, ultimately, closed.

3.3 Magnifying peripheral details to support interpretations

Details can be of great importance for the comprehension and interpretation of the literary text. To determine whether specific details are significant or not is, however, often a matter of negotiation in a classroom situation. Magnifying peripheral details means that students, or teachers, are unable to separate central from peripheral aspects of a story, and focus on peripheral content to support speculative, and sweeping, interpretations. While the teacher generally has a possibility to guide students back to what is more significant or central to the story, students sometimes refuse to abandon already embraced, but speculative, ideas. Sometimes teachers themselves highlight details of less significance and make these details the focus of discussion through the questions they ask.

   In the excerpt below, the class is talking about Raymond Carver's short story "Little Things". The story is about a couple that seems to be on the verge of separating, and the man and the woman are disputing over who gets to keep the child. Each tries to tear (literally) the child from the other. In the end, they both tighten their grip, and the man firmly pulls the child. The final sentence reads: "In this manner, the issue was decided." But how was it decided? The many interpretable gaps of the story, particularly the ending, could certainly make valuable points of departure for collective exploration. As we enter the classroom, the discussion has just shifted focus, from whether the couple really are the child's parents or not, to the residential issue:

Excerpt 3: 8th grade whole class talking about "Little Things" (R. Carver)

Victor:	But they have a house!
Teacher:	Is it a house?
Students:	Yes! No!
Karl:	No, maybe it is an apartment.

Teacher:	I don't know.
Lukas:	A summer house, maybe.
Frida:	It's an orphanage.
Liam:	A summer house… Oh, my God!
Teacher:	Like this then: why is it important to know whether it's a house or an apartment?
Students:	Others can rent an apartment/because… [several students speaking at the same time, partly indiscernible]
Victor:	It says the garden, damn it!

Teacher: [yells] WAIT! What did you say, Victor?

Victor:	She, what's her name again? She could fall out of a window if it's an apartment.
Teacher:	But not a house?

The discussion is initiated by Victor, who argues against some of his classmates' suggestion that the story takes place at an orphanage, after which they discuss whether it is a house or an apartment. The teacher asks why this might be of importance, but as shown in the excerpt, the students do not take that bite. Instead of stopping to reflect on why the residential situation might be important, or if this has anything to do with how the quarrel is solved, the students continue to discuss whether it is a house or an apartment. As shown in the last line, the teacher is ensnared by the internal logic of the interaction, and her questioning of Victor ("But not a house?") somehow submits to the position that housing is something worth discussing. This submission clearly does not help the students explore other aspects of the story, and they ultimately fail to connect the residential situation to the point of the story, or to the evocative ending.

Other conversations displayed similar patterns. One group discussed "Little Brother and Karlson" by Erna Osland, a story portraying a single mom raising two sons, the elder of whom seem to suffer from some kind of developmental disorder. Told from the perspective of the younger brother, the narrative thematizes things like responsibility-taking, longing for the mother's attention, and dark, secret wishes. However, the students get stuck on the fact that the two brothers share a bedroom, and start discussing the family's financial situation, which, in turn, seems to close the exploration of the story's more central, open-ended issues.

No doubt students will sometimes have a hard time separating significant details from insignificant ones. Although the teachers in our data often try to guide students towards a more interpretive stance, we also observe that their interest in keeping the discussion going, keeping students active, often prevails. What is central, and important, must thus give in to that which sparks students' immediate engagement. In this way, peripheral details of the stories are sometimes highlighted by the

discussion in a way that gives them unproportionly large influence on interpretation.

3.4 Staying on the surface—concentrating on the empirically verifiable and determinate

To focus on questions whose answers are easily verified by literal reading is a common way of starting a literature discussion. It often aims at creating a shared fundamental understanding of the plot. This might work as an activator of interpretation and can constitute an efficient path into exploring the text. Not seldom, however, do teachers and students remain at length on the level of more superficial questions. Instead of exploring the meaning-bearing layers of subtler themes, moods, and actions, discussions often continue to unravel explicit elements of the plot, in what seems to be an attempt to *comprehend* the story in its more basic sense.

In the excerpt below, teacher and students have read "The Story of an Hour", by Kate Chopin. The teacher starts off by asking "What is the story about?" As none of the students seems willing to answer the question, the discussion gets a slow start, which, in turn, seems to drive the teacher into asking questions about details and explicit content.

Excerpt 4: 8th grade whole class talking about "The Story of an Hour" (K. Chopin)

Teacher:	So she has… you're absolutely right, Anna, she has some kind of disease. Ok, what happens then? What happens next? And people die, you said. [silence] Lisa, what else happens in the text?
Lisa:	She finds out that her husband has died.
Teacher:	Mm, do we know how he died?
[silence]	
Lisa:	It was an accident.
Teacher:	Yes, yes it was… What happens next, when they find out that the husband is dead? Livia? What does she do when she finds out? [silence] Ella, what does she do?
Ella:	She kind of cries.
Teacher:	She cries, yes. What else does she do? What else does she do, Elvira?
Elvira:	She sits in some armchair and looks out the window.
Teacher:	Mm, and how does the story continue? Vincent?
Vincent:	He comes back.

This can be understood as a way of establishing a common understanding of the plot, by sorting out "what happens", and how "the story continues". The essential emotional drama, however, at the center of the text, of which the reader learns only

fragments, is not ventured upon in the discussion. The open room for meaning and interpretation, towards which the literal plot is pointing, never becomes a topic of collective exploration in this classroom. While plot-oriented teacher questions can pave the way for more interpretive concerns, this teacher's effort leads instead to a monologic interaction, in which correct verifiable answers appear more important than sincere inquiry and interpretation.

Indeed, the teacher struggles to get students to talk, and their unwillingness to do so leaves little room for questions on the interpretive level. Thus, staying on the surface, and focusing on what is easily verifiable by the text, can be seen as a less challenging invite to students who are disinclined to speak, perhaps out fear of "being wrong". However, while consensus about the basic plot may be a good place to start, and a steppingstone for digging deeper into the text (Magirius et al., 2023), there is a risk that too much concentration on the empirically verifiable and determinate might suggest to students that their interpretive response is less valued. By repeatedly pointing them back to the text, the teacher may seem to signal that she is not very interested in what they think about the story, or their interpretations, thereby perhaps making them even more unwilling to participate in the discussion.

3.5 Skipping between inquiries instead of developing lines of thought

In a similar vein, moving too fast between different questions, never letting students take the time to develop their ideas or interpretations, can also prevent an explorative mode of interaction. In this case, the problem is not specifically that the questions focus only on surface level, even if that may also occur. Rather, the fifth mechanism identified is characterized by the teacher throwing students a cascade of short-answer questions, skipping from one subject to another, without giving students a chance to reflect more thoroughly upon what has been said, or ask them to motivate or contextualize their responses. Students may either be asked to retrieve explicit content from the plot, or they may be guided toward indeterminate or ambiguous aspects, demanding reflection and interpretation, both, however, with the same intense pace of questioning. This type of teacher orchestration is partly related to the previous (mechanism no 4) in that this strategy can also be understood as a way of avoiding silence, but it is not used as a way of establishing a common understanding. Rather, it seems to be used for exposing an array of different topics, of which some might later be chosen for digging deeper into.

In the following excerpt, a class is talking about a picture book for teenagers by Swedish writer Anna Höglund, called *You can only talk about it with rabbits*. In the book, a rabbit head, or rabbit features, symbolizes the feeling of being different from everybody else and of being highly sensitive. The teacher tries to turn the students' attention to a passage in the text that she cannot find, to help them understand the symbolic meaning of the rabbits. The class, however, is rather silent.

Excerpt 5: 8th grade whole class talking about You can only talk about it with rabbits *(A. Höglund)*

Teacher:	Anything else on the choice or words? Anyone else who has reacted to something in the language… how it's written and what kind of words are used? You talked about patterns… that is something that you can always look for, it's a very good example. [3 s] Since you are not suggesting anything, I've got something, because I thought, when I read this text, about the fact that sometimes it says rabbits and sometimes it says human beings and that makes me wonder if the author, or this narrator, when it uses rabbits and when it uses human beings. Did anyone notice that? [2 s] I find that very interesting. [3 s] I'll see if I can find an example… [browsing] "Sometimes people think that you exaggerate", but people are more in general, but I know… he uses the word parents and there's nothing strange about that either… Do you find an example of rabbits and human beings? [browsing]. Here's grandpa… here [4 s] did you understand what I meant, that they use different expressions? Did anyone else notice that? Do you find anything? Did *you* find anything?
Tomas:	It wasn't in the text itself, but at the end there was a dedication: "To S and all the other rabbits".
Teacher:	Yes, there! Yes, exactly! What do you think about that?
Tomas:	Well, it says something else, but I can't see…
Teacher:	No, it's true, there was a black picture and I thought that the xerox machine would die if I tried to copy black pages. But you noticed that, Tomas! There was a dedication to all the other rabbits. What does the word rabbit mean here? Sometimes he says human beings and… now, I couldn't find that right now, and sometimes it uses human beings [sic!]. I find that interesting… We did talk in the beginning as well about how you want to be yourself or if you don't like yourself. Did we get anywhere in that discussion? What do you actually think about that? Feeling a little bit left out… not feeling like everybody else [3 s] What do you think? Could this rabbit be something else? Is it a human being? [3 s] It is almost the same question as when we read *Cicada*. Have you thought about that?

The teacher dominates the discussion. She tries to turn the students' attention to a specific part of the text that she cannot find. When not getting any answers, she moves forward with new questions all the while she is browsing for an example in the book. The class remains silent, until Tomas points to a dedication in the end of the book. Although the teacher acknowledges his remark, Tomas does not get the chance to explain what he thinks that the dedication might mean. Instead, the teacher asks questions about 1) what the word rabbit means, 2) what it is like when you cannot be yourself or 3) when you feel left out, 4) if the rabbit could symbolize something else and 5) about a discussion they have had about another book. Even if these questions may be seen to encircle the same thought, the students, who are not necessarily keeping pace with the teachers' mind flow, will be likely to interpret it as a barrage of different issues. Although they touch upon central aspects of the story, the constant skipping between questions discourages a development of more coherent lines of thought and reflection.

3.6 Encouraging readers to connect fictive elements to their own lives

Asking students to connect elements from a fictional story to their own lives has been a frequently used strategy in Scandinavian literature education (Rødnes, 2014). Effective in its appeal to personal response and engagement in the text, there is a risk that the discussion will change course to focus on the students themselves instead of the text (Johansson, 2021). In the analyzed data, asking students to connect elements from the text to their own experiences often means asking them what they would do in a situation like the one described in the story. In the following excerpt, while talking about "Little Brother and Karlson", the teacher tries to engage students into an ethical stand by asking them how they would react if they were the little brother in a similar situation.

Excerpt 6: 8th grade whole class talking about "Little Brother and Karlson" (E. Osland)

Teacher:	It feels as if the mother gives all her attention to the big brother and the little brother doesn't get anything at all. What do you think about that, Elliot? How would you feel in that situation?
Elliot:	[indiscernible]
Teacher:	If you were a big brother or little brother?
Elliot:	Little brother.
Teacher:	If you were a little brother… would it feel… alright? If your mother didn't care at all about you?
Elliot:	Uhm uhm…
Teacher:	Tim whispers "no" here, acting prompter. Maybe Tim wants to help Elliot?
Students:	[grunting]
Teacher:	What do you think, Tim?
Tim:	Well, I think it's pretty obvious. You do want to… you shouldn't just focus on one. No, I would say in that case. Or, everyone ought to think like that, really.
Teacher:	It feels a little bit unfair, doesn't it? Right? Ha?
Nike:	Yes. Yes.
Tim:	I agree with Nike.
Teacher:	Yes, yes, exactly and that's what we're developing. That is what we do because I asked a follow-up question on that uhum… so Nike was right. We WILL develop uhum… good. Is there anyone here that agrees? That we should… try… like… best if you get treated fair, right? How should the mother act then?
Nike:	Well… well… I don't know.

> *Teacher:*   What would you want your mother to do if you were a little brother and
>   every night you lie in bed, every evening, waiting for mum to sit down by
>   your bed?

The students are reluctant to discuss what they would have done if they were in the little brother's shoes, as the teacher highlights the unfairness of the mother to her youngest son. When Tim says, "it's pretty obvious…", this can be understood as a way of saying either that the question is superfluous, or that he does not want to talk about it. In the last line, the teacher inquires again about what the students would wish for if it was their mother, thereby indicating her eagerness to make them connect the story to their own lives. However, since "Little Brother and Karlson" portrays an exceptional and disquieting family situation, asking students to relate it to their own life, or to project themselves into the narrated situation, is quite complicated. Although the strategy of asking students to imagine "being there" themselves aims at enabling comprehension of the situation, a projection of the reader self (based on his/her own experiences of, for instance, parent-child relationships) also runs the risk of raising a barrier towards perceiving the unfamiliar and undetermined facets of the literary representation. Asking students to associate the unique aesthetic address of the story with their own lives may thus easily condense the open spaces of literature to more familiar one-sided understandings. This way the discussion easily eschews ambiguity and unfamiliarity for the sake of establishing coherence, transparency, and connection between text and reader.

4.   DISCUSSION

The study set out to disentangle some of the interactional mechanisms and drives through which the openness of literary works is closed in classroom discussion. An assumption from which this research interest is warranted is that these prompts will impede on students' exploration of literary complexities and ambiguities, and risk discouraging an open-minded consideration of uncertainty, contradiction, metaphors, and other complexities in future literary reading. As previous research has indicated a promising educational potential of inviting students to consider open-ended text-based problems (Campbell, 2018; Koek, 2019; Sønneland, 2019), it is essential to learn more about the specific pedagogical challenges connected with this type of content.

As shown, the observed discussions contain at least six types of closing mechanisms: 1) *Forcing a one-sided interpretation*; 2) *Inferring new context, not given by the text, to embed already preferred interpretations*; 3) *Magnifying peripheral details to support interpretations*; 4) *Staying on the surface – concentrating on the empirically verifiable and determinate; 5) Skipping between inquiries instead of developing lines of thought;* and *6) Encouraging readers to connect fictive elements to their own lives*. As stated above, these six do not exhaust the range of potential closing mechanisms in similar discussions at large, nor in the particular classrooms where they were identified. Rather they represent an attempt

at describing analytically a type of challenge which teachers need to be aware of in order to create more room for exploration of interpretive openness.

As interactional components, these mechanisms are not forces induced by *either* students *or* teachers on their own, but trajectories produced in interplay between partly established and partly open roles in classroom discussion. For example, when teacher questions remain at the surface of the text (mechanism no 4), thereby encouraging students to seek answers that are easily verifiable, and easy to retrieve by explicit details from the text, it often occurs as a response to students being reluctant to speak at all. The teacher thus employs a strategy for lowering the threshold of students' participation, in an attempt to open the door for discussion. However, from the point of view of asking who is doing the actual closing of the text, we may still argue that the teacher has a particular responsibility in this case, since her questions define (or at least suggest) the scope of students' thinking about the text. This way, we can say that for a majority of the mechanisms identified (no 1, 4, 5, and 6), the teacher is at least mainly, or most often, responsible for closing the openness of the literary text. For the remaining two mechanisms (no 2 and 3), it is rather the students – or at least some of the students (for it is never all of them) – who pull the discussion in the direction of closing the space of openness.

When discussing room for openness in the classroom, we must acknowledge its relationship to the paradigmatic educational ideal of understanding. While we might value openness in literature for its capacity to represent the degree of uncertainty often experienced in personal or social aspects of life (relationships, future, choices, politics etc.), clarity and coherence serve as innate standards both for scientific-based knowledge expected by compulsory education, and for reading comprehension. Interestingly, recent research into multiple text comprehension and learning (sometimes with specific attention to contradiction between different texts discussing the same topic) has contributed critical knowledge of text complexity, and of the evaluative component in text processing (McCrudden et al., 2023). In this case, teaching integration of perspectives, and evaluation by source and argument, are crucial steps to building multiple-level comprehension. However, to understand more fully the challenges faced in the classroom when text-based content of instruction is characterized by literary ambiguity or by juxtaposed lines of argument, additional analysis of instructional interaction between teachers and students is necessary.

The present study indicates, for instance, that to maintain an explorative attitude and still provide productive orchestration of the discussion, requires a firm grasp of the text by the teacher. Particularly, the teacher needs to pay sincere attention to the destabilizing signals of the text, e.g., its invitations to break the spell of a coherent text world, instead of seeking deliberately for signals of consistency (Johansen, 2022). Here lurks a classic didactic dilemma between establishing knowledge and supporting students' inquiry (Magirius et al., 2023). In one sense, it concerns the teachers' role vis-à-vis students. One the one hand, to expose his or her own uncertainty about content contradicts the role of the teacher as provider of

knowledge and facts. Hence many teachers will want to certify that they have understood the text completely before taking it to the class. On the other hand, to experience, as a teacher, that you do in fact understand the text might make it less likely to adopt an open, explorative attitude together with the students, especially if they express difficulties with understanding the text. To encourage sustained attention to the unfamiliar, the uncertain, or the undetermined, may seem uncomfortable, or even awkward, for a teacher when students complain that the text is incomprehensible. Learning to balance a collaborative establishment of textual known knowns on the one hand, and an exploration of known unknowns on the other, is therefore necessary for teachers who are to lead discussions about open works of literature.

A recurrent problem in the observed classrooms seems to be that both teacher and students are a bit too eager to arrive at final conclusions. Even if participants do not always agree with each other, the individual reader is rarely heard to question his or her own thinking, to explicitly think again, or reconsider. If anything, what an undecidability didactics (Johansen, 2022) seeks to foster is precisely the habit of reconsidering initial suggestions, or at least the sincere readiness by students to do so. Following Dewey, "to turn the thing over in mind, to reflect, means to hunt for additional evidence, for new data, that will develop the suggestion" (Dewey, 1910, p. 13). Accepting our initial ideas as final conclusions, Dewey argues, is the easiest way of thinking, and often serves to resolve a felt sensation of mental uneasiness.[3] Reflective thinking, however, is demanding, and "involves willingness to endure a condition of mental unrest and disturbance" (ibid). The quality to be developed then, not only by teachers, but by groups of learners at any stage, is the capability of collaborative and protracted inquiry, and a shared acceptance of certain degrees of confusion. In fact, one of the teacher's first goal should be to convince students that, contrary to what they might instinctively believe, confusion is not always a failure, but an advanced state of understanding. It implies for one thing consciousness of known unknowns in the text, which in itself derives only from an in-depth reading.

To some extent, willingness to suspend judgment and sustain an explorative mode of reading and talking might thus be at odds with ideals promoted in many other areas of education, where students are expected to solve assignments according to scripts, provide coherent answers and solutions, and demonstrate understanding. School culture favors certainty above ambiguity, and coherent plots above open endings. This way the education system nurtures a desire for closure (McCormick, 1989), and, in the worst case, an antipathy for the state of not having decided yet, i.e., the state, or feeling, that there are two equally good solutions to the problem in front of me, and I don't know which of them to choose. Again, our ambition is not to scorn teachers for failing to maintain openness in discussions. As already mentioned above, the teachers captured on video in this study all provided

---

[3] A point later stressed at length, and with a wealth of decisive empirical evidence, by Kahneman (2011).

repeated evidence of inviting their students to thoughtful and explorative dialogue, encouraging them to avoid hasty conclusions about major interpretive issues in the texts. What we aim for is to raise attention to trajectories of interaction that pull readers' minds in the other direction, whether it is the students who infer ill-supported context in order to embed a premature, but already final (in their own minds) interpretation, or if it is the teacher who reduces the story complexity by asking students to determine fictive elements by reference to their own lives, and their own imagined feelings should they have been in a character's shoes.

Along the same line as Eco (1989) argues for the liaison between the appreciation for open works of art and modern human's sensation of life's contradictions and incongruities, we suggest that the literature lesson's capacity for accepting, maintaining, and exploring openness as an aesthetic, and ethical, meaning potential is a significant quality. A pedagogically critical question, therefore, is how teachers can facilitate an explorative attitude in students, and encourage a tolerance for openness, ambiguity, and uncertainty in literature. This is an essential area of further scholarly examination. To close the text means to reduce its meaning potential, and thereby its legitimacy for representing complex and contradictory human conditions, and to reduce its capacity to represent the ambiguities of real life. Stimulating a tolerance for openness in literary response is thus not only about defending a revered ideal of reading literature *as literature*, or as a truly literate person would read it, but also about endorsing an essential quality of life, and a capacity for dealing with the ambiguities and complexities in real life.

ACKNOLWEDGEMENTS

REFERENCES

Blau, S. (2003). *The literature workshop: Teaching texts and their readers.* Heinemann.

Campbell, C. (2018). Educating openness: Umberto Eco's poetics of openness as a pedagogical value. *Signs and Society, 6*(2), 305–331. https://doi.org/10.1086/695567

Chick, N. L., Hassel, H., & Haynie, A. (2009). Pressing an ear against the hive: reading literature for complexity. *Pedagogy, 9*(3), 399–422. https://doi.org/10.1215/15314200-2009-003

Clark, K. F., & Graves, M. F. (2008). Open and directed text mediation in literature instruction: Effects on comprehension and attitudes. *Australian Journal of Language and Literacy, 31*(1), 9–29.

Dewey, J. (1910). *How we think*. D. C. Heath & Co.

Eco, U. (1989). *The open work.* Harvard University Press.

Iser, W. (1978). *The act of reading: A theory of aesthetic response*. The Johns Hopkins University Press.

Johansen, M. B. (2017). The way I understood it, it wasn't meant to be understood' – when 6th grade reads Franz Kafka. *Journal of Curriculum Studies, 49*(5), 579–598. https://doi.org/10.1080/00220272.2016.1247912.

Johansen, M. B. (2022). Uafgørlighedsdidaktik i litteraturundervisningen. *Nordlit, 48*, 1–12. https://doi.org/10.7557/13.6330.

Johansson, M. (2021). Literary socialisation through education: A comparative study of Swedish and French upper secondary school students' reception of a narrative text. *L1–Educational Studies in Language and Literature, 21*(2), 1–25. https://doi.org/10.17239/L1ESLL-2021.21.02.03

Kahneman, D. (2011). *Thinking, fast and slow.* Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

Kintsch, W. (1998). *Comprehension: A paradigm for cognition*. Cambridge University Press.

Koek, M., Janssen, T., Hakemulder, F., & Rijlaarsdam, G. (2019). Literature education as a school for thinking: Students' learning experiences in secondary literature education. *L1–Educational Studies in Language and Literature, 19*, 1–33. https://doi.org/10.17239/L1ESLL-2019.19.01.01

Levine, S., Hauser, M., & Smith, M. W. (2022). Authority and authenticity in teachers' questions about literature in three contexts. *English Teaching: Practice & Critique, 21*(2), 192–208. https://doi.org/10.1108/ETPC-03-2021-0021

Magirius, M., Scherf, D., & Steinmetz, M. (2023). Instructive dialogues on literary texts: A framework for dialogic teaching promoting high-level comprehension in the literature classroom. *L1–Educational Studies in Language and Literature, 23*(2), 1–27. https://doi.org/10.21248/l1esll.2023.23.2.584

McCormick, K. (1989). *The cultural imperatives underlying cognitive acts* (Reading-to-write report No. 9). Technical report No 28. Center for the study of writing, Berkeley.

McCormick, K. (1994). *The culture of reading and the teaching of English*. Manchester University Press.

McCrudden, M., Bråten, I., & Salmerón, L. (2023). Learning from multiple texts. In R. J. Tierney, F. Rizvi, & K. Ercikan (Eds.), *International encyclopedia of education* (pp. 353–363). Elsevier.

McKenzie, C. A., & Bender, G. (2021). The call of ambiguity: lingering over uncertainty as classroom practice. *English Teaching: Practice & Critique, 20*(1), 51–63. https://doi.org/10.1108/ETPC-02-2020-0013

Miall, D. S. (2015). The experience of literariness: Affective and narrative aspects. In A. Scarinzi (Ed.), *Aesthetics and the embodied mind: Beyond art theory and the Cartesian mind-body dichotomy* (pp. 175–189). Springer Science + Business Media. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-017-9379-7_11

Nissen, A., Tengberg, M., Svanbjörnsdóttir, B. M. B., Gabrielsen, I. L., Blikstad-Balas, M., & Klette, K. (2021). Function and use of literary texts in Nordic schools. *L1–Educational Studies in Language and Literature, 21*(2), 1–22. https://doi.org/10.17239/L1ESLL-2021.21.02.10

Nystrand, M. (1997). *Opening dialogue: Understanding the dynamics of language and learning in the English classroom*. Teachers College Press.

Oatley, K. (1999). Why fiction may be twice as true as fact: Fiction as cognitive and emotional simulation. *Review of General Psychology, 3*(2), 101–117. https://doi.org/10.1037/1089-2680.3.2.101

Olin-Scheller, C., & Tengberg, M. (2016). *Läsa mellan raderna*. Gleerups.

Rabinowitz, P. J., & Bancroft, C. (2014). Euclid at the core: Recentering literacy education. *Style, 48*(1), 54–61. https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5325/style.48.1.1

Rainey E. C. (2017). Disciplinary literacy in English language arts: Exploring the social and problem-based nature of literary reading and reasoning. *Reading Research Quarterly, 52*(1), 53–71. https://doi.org/10.1002/rrq.154

Scholes, R. (1985). *Textual power: Literary theory and the teaching of English*. Yale University Press.

Schreier, M. (2012). *Qualitative content analysis in practice*. Sage Publications.

Shklovsky, V. ([1917] 1988) Art as technique. In D. Lodge (Ed.), *Modern criticism and theory: A reader* (pp. 16–30). Longmans.

Sønneland, M. (2019). Friction in fiction. A study of the importance of open problems for literary conversations. *L1–Educational Studies in Language and Literature, 19*, 1–28. https://doi.org/10.17239/L1ESLL-2019.19.01.07

Tengberg, M., Johansson, M., & Sønneland, M. (2023). Dialogue and defamiliarization: The conceptual framing of an intervention for challenging readers and improving the quality of literature discussions. *L1–Educational Studies in Language and Literature, 23*(2), 1–24. https://doi.org/10.21248/l1esll.2023.23.2.566

Tengberg, M., Skar, G. B., Huebner, A., Sønneland, M., Johansson, M., Wejrum, M., & Biörklund, A. (under review). Improving the quality of teacher-led literature discussions: Using Inquiry Dialogue to support teacher facilitation and student collaboration.

Thornberg, R., & Charmaz, K. (2014). Grounded theory and theoretical coding. In U. Flick (Ed.), *The SAGE handbook of qualitative data analysis* (pp. 153–169). Sage Publications.

Thorson, S. (2005). *Den dubbla receptionen: Om litteratursamtal mellan elever och deras svensklärare*. Litteraturvetenskapliga institutionen, Göteborgs universitet.

Thyberg, A. (2012). *Ambiguity and estrangement: Peer-led deliberative dialogues on literature in the EFL classroom*. (Diss.) Linnaeus University Press.

Tsur, R. (2008). *Toward a theory of cognitive poetics*. 2nd ed. Liverpool University Press.

Wilder, L. (2002). 'Get comfortable with uncertainty': A study of the conventional values of literary analysis in an undergraduate literature course. *Written Communication, 19*(1), 175–221. https://doi.org/10.1177/074108830201900106

Wilkinson, I. A. G., Murphy, P. K., & Binici, S. (2015). Dialogue-intensive pedagogies for promoting reading comprehension: What we know, what we need to know. In L. B. Resnick, C. S. C. Asterhan, & S. N. Clarke (Eds.), *Socializing intelligence through academic talk and dialogue* (pp. 37–50). American Educational Research Association.

Zwaan, R. A., & Radvansky, G. A. (1998). Situation models in language comprehension and memory. *Psychological Bulletin, 123*, 162–185. https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.123.2.162

FULL LIST OF STORIES USED IN THE INTERVENTION

Agualusa, J. E. (2001). Om skrattandets faror [The Dangers of Laughing].

Carver, R. (1988). Little Things. In *Where I'm calling from: The selected stories*. Atlantic Monthly Press.

Chopin, K. ([1894] 1895). The Story of an Hour. Published in *St. Louis Life,* 1895-01-05.

Höglund, A. (2013). Om detta talar man endast med kaniner *[You can only talk about it with rabbits]*. Lilla Piratförlaget.

Jacobsen, R. (2001). Brunnen [The Well]. In *Fugler og soldater*. Cappelen.

Nesser, H. (2000). Om någonting händer [If Anything Shold Happen]. In *Färdlektyr 2000*. Svenska lokaltrafikföreningen.

Osland, E. (2004). Lillebror och Karlson [Little Brother and Karlson]. In *Nær nok*. Samlaget.

Solstad, D. (1967). Novell [Short Story] In *Svingstol*. Oktober forlag.

Tan, S. (2018). *Cicada*. Hachette Children's Group.

Wung-Sung, J. (2000). De tre väninnorna [The Three Friends]. In *Og havet klapper.* Samleren.