

Function and Use of Literary Texts in Nordic Schools

Literature instruction is traditionally considered an essential domain of L1 education all over the world. It is sometimes argued that literature has lost some of its former position, but in a Nordic context, literary texts are (although also included in an extended notion of text) still ascribed a prominent position in national curricula. (Gourvennec et al., 2020).

Previously, Nordic research on literature instruction has predominantly consisted of small-scaled classroom studies with few comparative attempts. Many studies have relied on interventions, and on ideas launched by researchers. Thus, we know little about how, and to what extent, L1 teachers actually include literature in their everyday teaching across classrooms, schools and countries.

In this study, which is a comparative study relying on four consecutive video recorded L1 lessons from 102 classrooms in Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden, the function and use of literary texts is investigated by means of video-analysis, qualitative coding, and statistical comparisons. The aim of the study is to investigate the position of literary texts in Nordic lower secondary school, and to describe the characteristics of literature instruction in these countries.

An analysis of the video data indicates that literature plays an important part in L1 education in Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden. In all four countries, narrative texts were favoured above other genres. Students in a large number of Swedish classrooms read and worked with the same novel for teenagers, but normally short stories and excerpts from novels were used when the aim was to give students joint reading experiences. Very often literary texts were used in order to help students develop their reading and reading comprehension. The analysis also suggests that many teachers aimed at providing their students with positive reading experiences.

Literature instruction, Nordic comparisons, Secondary education, Video analysis, Language arts

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