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English

Teaching Literature as a Means to Promoting Critical Thinking

A Teacher Perspective

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Abstract

Developing critical thinking and mastering its skills has been a vital priority for the curriculum in Swedish upper-secondary school. The National Curriculum for upper-secondary school and the syllabus for the English subject emphasize the importance of implementing and enhancing the development of the students' critical thinking which leads to having active learners who are able to think creatively and keeps them away from becoming narrow-minded. The purpose of this study is to explore the prospect of teaching critical thinking through reading literature. Guided by the critical thinking skills that are defined in The Delphi Report including (1) interpretation, (2) analysis, (3) evaluation, (4) inference, (5) explanation and (6) self-regulation, this study explores the possibility of promoting critical thinking skills through reading literature. The study also examines the efficacy of the reader-response approach in helping the students to be critical thinkers and active readers. Using qualitative data from conducting interviews, this study analyses teachers' perspectives and considered the implications for teaching literature in terms of fostering the students' critical thinking. The study showed that the teachers' awareness of the significance of integrating literature in teaching English was found to play a great role in fostering the students as critical thinkers. The study also showed that teachers emphasized the importance of in-class discussions about literary works in order to expand the students' thinking horizons and enhance their sense of self-confidence as contributors to the learning process. It also showed that the reader-response theory has a significant role in fostering the students' critical thinking even though it is not clearly stated in the teachers' perspectives on teaching literature.

Keywords: reading literature, critical thinking, developing critical thinking skills, the reader-response approach, Socratic Questioning skill, efferent reading, aesthetic reading, methods and activities

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Introduction

The latest decades have witnessed a fast-growing development in technology where access to sources of information and knowledge is easy and at one's fingertips. This creates a challenge for students who will need to understand critically and evaluate what they meet in everyday life. Therefore, it is important for teachers to prepare their students to cope with the new requirements and to enable them to become active participants in a democratic society. Teaching students critical thinking is not restricted to one subject, but it can be thought of as a general term for the intellectual abilities that learners should have. This is an essential part of the learning process for the students in higher education because the learners at this stage need the ability to think and evaluate the learning material they obtain by themselves. Many scholars and researchers have different definitions of critical thinking and one important general definition of this process as "thinking that has a purpose (proving a point, interpreting what something means, solving a problem)" (Facione, 2011, p. 4). Jones and Haydon (2014, p. 1) highlight the significance of critical thinking in education in order to foster students who are able to question life situations, who can rethink about their beliefs and assumptions, and who can solve problems and reflect on the consequences of different solutions. They provide a definition of critical thinking as "a manner of thinking about any topic or problem where the thinker attempts to improve the quality of his or her thinking" (Jones & Haydon, 2014, p. 2). Consequently, this will help the learners to become active in evaluating and analysing the large amount of information they face in different fields of education.

Literature has a major role in preparing young learners to be active participants, who are able to accept multiple perspectives about life issues and appreciate the difference in their peers' opinions. Rosenblatt (1995) through her 'transactional theory' (as cited by Raines, 2005, p. 28) emphasizes the influence of literature on developing the students' critical thinking and the significance of the reader's response in giving the learners an opportunity to be thoughtful, active and independent readers. According to Raines (2005, p. 29), the role of discussion is clearly highlighted as the students learn to convey their interpretations to their peers. Similarly, Probst (1981, p. 46) confirms the importance of the response-based teaching of literature, which implies an appreciation of the students' human associations and experiences, but at the same time making them "develop a tolerance for ambiguity".

This research focuses on the following question: Do teachers in Swedish upper-secondary school integrate literature into the English subject as a means to foster the students' thinking abilities? The main objective in this research is to highlight the importance of reading

literature in order to help our students be more attentive and active readers. Another objective is to know the teachers' perspective about the strategies or the methods that will help the students develop critical thinking skills. The last objective is to investigate the teachers' perspectives about the role of the reader-response approach in developing the students' abilities to think critically. This is a relevant issue for English subject teachers because the goal of education in English is to give the learners the opportunity to develop knowledge about "livsvillkor, samhällsfrågor och kulturella företeelser i olika sammanhang" [life conditions, social issues and cultural phenomena in different contexts]¹ (Skolverket, Engelska 1). As literature is a representation of human experience, the reader gets a great opportunity to reflect on one's assumptions and beliefs and to develop critical thinking abilities.

Background

Steering documents:

Swedish students are required to be active individuals who are able to take initiatives and responsibility, which means putting ideas into action to achieve one's purposes. This is clearly expressed by the Swedish National Agency for Education in the Swedish curriculum (2011) where the school should "stimulera eleverna kreativitet, nyfikenhet och självförtroende samt vilja att pröva och omsätta ideer i handling och att lösa problem" [stimulate the students' creativity, curiosity and self-confidence and the will to try and put ideas in action and to solve problems]² (Skolverket, Läroplan 3). This statement is expressed under a section titled "Skolans värdegrund och uppgifter" [values and duty of the school]. Creativity and curiosity come as a result of the learner's ability to think and question the ideas and assumptions rather than taking everything for granted. The students' ability to solve problems also results from their arguments and discussions with each other in order to find solutions and reflect on consequences of different alternatives in every situation.

This idea of argumentation and discussion is confirmed in the English syllabus in upper-secondary school. Under the core content in terms of reception for Course 5, 6 and 7, it is stated that teaching in this course should consider dealing with "texter som är [...] diskuterande [...] and argumenterande" [texts that are ... discussing ... and arguing] (Skolverket, Engelska 3, 6, 9). The principle of discussion is also applied under the core

¹ Here and all further translations of the National Syllabus of the English subject are mine

² Here and all further translations of skolverket 2011 are mine

content in terms of production and interaction where teaching in English subject should deal with “muntliga och skriftliga produktion och interaktion [...] där eleverna [...] värderar, motiverar sina åsikter, diskuterar och argumenterar” [Oral and written production and interaction ... where students ... value, motivate their opinions, discuss and argue] (Skolverket, Engelska 3). The same content is included in Course 6 but with little difference in adding the element of reasoning in argumentation activities. But a broader concept of argumentation is added in Course 7 where teaching should consider “muntlig och skriftlig produktion och interaktion [...] där eleverna argumenterar ur olika perspektiv, [...] värderar, utredar, förhandlar och motiverar sina åsikter” [Oral and written production and interaction ... where students argue from different perspectives ... value, investigate, negotiate and motivate their opinions] (9).

The knowledge requirements for every course establish a ground for how to evaluate the students' communicative and productive skills. It is clearly stated that critical thinking is used as criteria to evaluate the quality of the students' performance. In the knowledge requirements for Course 5 (grade E) it is expected that “eleven kan välja och med viss säkerhet använda strategier för att tillgodogöra sig och kritiskt granska innehållet i talad och skriven engelska” [the student can choose and with some certainty use strategies to utilize and scrutinize the content of the spoken and written English] (Skolverket, English 4). The same criteria for critical thinking is mentioned in the knowledge requirements for Course 6 where the students should demonstrate their ability to choose material from different sources and “använda på ett relevant, effektivt och kritiskt sätt det valda materialet i sin egen produktion och interaktion” [use in a relevant, effective and critical way the chosen material in their own production and interaction] (Skolverket, Engelska 8).

In a nutshell, it is clear that students in upper-secondary school are required to demonstrate their critical thinking ability in productive and communicative skills. They are expected to think and reflect about the content of the English subject in spoken materials like an audio conversation, and in written ones such as different kinds of narrative, descriptive and persuasive texts. Even the students' choice of their own materials should be used in a relevant and critical way in order to be able to understand and interpret the hidden meanings in these materials. The Swedish National Agency for Education mentions in the commentary material to the English subject syllabus that the terms ”kritiskt granska och källkritiskt förhållningssätt” [scrutinize and source-critical attitude] (ämneskommentar om ämnet engelska 8) have basic significance in all courses. This implies that the students should

acquire the ability to foster a critical attitude about the different perspectives they meet at school.

Literature approaches

Using literature as a significant factor in establishing the ground for the students' critical thinking skills has gained attention in many scholarly articles. Paul (1997, p. 2) argues for the clear correlation between developing the critical thinking abilities through reading literature. According to Paul (1997, p. 5) reading literature is as an active process where the reader gets engaged in creating meaning through associations from different reading experiences and other life experiences. Paul (1997) considers that the readers could have opportunity to expand their horizons and put the content of this reading in a wider context in accordance with their previous readings and life experiences. This implies that through the continuous encounter with challenging literary works "readers must engage in constructive, analytic thought to get a meaning of literature" (Paul, 1997, p. 5). According to Paul, providing the students with authentic and challenging literary texts that arouse curiosity will stimulate the students' engagement and thinking abilities. Paul (1997, p. 6) also argues for the importance of choosing a literary text that matches the reader's "level of challenge and interest" through the guidance of the teacher.

Reader-response theory had a major influence on teachers' perceptions about teaching literature. In contrast to the text-centered theory, which considers meaning residing in the text itself where the readers' role is to discover the correct meaning through the literary analysis of the literary work and disregards the reader's subjective experiences and their prior beliefs and knowledge as mentioned by Beach, Appleman, Hynds and Wilhelm (2011, p. 42), Louise Rosenblatt (1995, p. 27) argues that in literary reading "both reader and the text are essential to the transactional process of making meaning". Rosenblatt's theory is based on two stances in responding to literature: the 'efferent stance' and the 'aesthetic stance'. The 'efferent stance' means reading literature to answer the factual questions and focusing on the reader's attention on the literary work's public context (Rosenblatt, 1995, p. 32). In contrast, the 'aesthetic reading' requires the reader to focus on the feelings and associations in order to be more reflective and able to rethink about one's own assumptions and beliefs (Rosenblatt, 1995, p. 292). Rosenblatt (1956, p. 69) confirms that in order to help the young readers develop an aesthetic stance to literature, they should feel a kind of link to the literary work

they read where “that world must be fitted into the context of (their) own understanding and interests” (Rosenblatt, 1956, p. 69). The author’s philosophy is frequently cited by many scholars and philosophers. Spiegel (1998, p. 45) refers to the significance of this approach where the reader’s construction of meaning and appreciation of multiple interpretations makes the student able to value peers’ perspectives and give the reader an opportunity to rethink one’s initial assumptions and responses. This implies, according to Spiegel (1998), that participating in creating meaning and responding to literature enable the readers to be “more reflective and more critical readers and to move to higher levels of thinking and richer understanding of literature” (Spiegel, 1998, p.45). In the same way, Hunt (1982) argues for the importance of focusing on the reading process rather than seeking to interpret and understand the text. Hunt (1982, p. 355) claims that “as teachers of literature, after all, our most central concern should be with the way our students approach the next text they read, not with the results of their approaches to the last text”. Hunt’s (1982, p. 355) argument differs from Spiegel’s in the sense that even though a reciprocal relationship happens between the reader and text, his main concern is to develop the readers into self-conscious of their role in the reading process. Hunt’s (1982) perspective shows the teachers’ responsibility to intervene in the process the students read literature in order to develop their sense of control over their reading rather than merely being “producers of interpretations” (p. 384). Hunt (1982, p. 357) urges the teachers to encourage the students’ expectations and different interpretations about literature through escaping the attention on the traditional questions when reading a literary text. This, according to Hunt (1982, p. 357), results in having confident readers in the classroom.

As it is noticed from these approaches, the authors’ main concern is to encourage the students to be active and thoughtful readers. This is in line with the aim of the English subject where it is stated that “I undervisningen ska eleverna få möta talad och skriven engelska av olika slag samt få sätta innehållet i relation till egna erfarenheter och kunskaper” [in teaching students should meet written and spoken English of different kinds, and relate the content to their own experiences and knowledge] (skolverket, Engelska 1). This clearly shows how the students are expected to deal with literature. It is not the fact-finding or the textual analysis of a literary work that matters, but it is the reading process or the reading approach itself that helps the readers to reflect on and relate what they read to their individual responses that are shaped by their individual knowledge and prior beliefs. And although Hunt (1982) shows a kind of criticism about the teachers’ way of dealing with literature and the dominant focus on interpreting, evaluating and answering the factual questions about the text, an agreement

appears among the scholars and Rosenblatt on the importance of the reading process in order to foster the readers confidence in reading practices.

Theoretical background

Historical overview about critical thinking

Critical thinking has its roots in the vision of Socrates 2,500 years ago when he considered the importance of giving rational justifications to one's claims and arguments (Paul, Elder, & Bartell, 1997). Socrates' vision (as cited in Paul et al., 1997) indicated that it is not possible to accept knowledge that has contradictory beliefs or that is lacking rational evidence. That is why Socrates (as cited in Paul et al. 1997) established a vision with teaching practice that promotes asking deep questions that help the learners "probe profoundly into thinking before (they) accept ideas as worthy of belief" (Paul et al., 1997). This method is known as the "Socratic Questioning" which highlights the importance of logical thinking and enables the learners to think reasonably and examine their beliefs and assumptions in order to reach the right knowledge (Paul et at, 1997). Another contribution to the development of critical thinking was made by the English intellectual Francis Bacon (as cited in Paul et al., 1997), who considered the importance of applying critical thought in various domains of human life and acknowledged the people's need to foster their thinking habits in order to avoid the intellectual fallacies which he called 'idols' (Bacon as cited in Paul et al., 1997). John Locke (as cited in Paul et al., 1997) is another influential philosopher who confirmed the same belief in the significance of the critical mind of the thinkers as a means to have a "thoughtful citizen" who is aware of their rights in society and able to criticize reasonably the inconsistencies in governments' practices at that time (Locke as cited in Paul et al., 1997).

The concept of critical thinking is not new in education. Dewey's (1909) concept of critical thinking (as cited in Fisher, 2001, p. 2) is an active process that requires "reflective thinking" and it implies that the person engages in a process of questioning one's assumptions and finding relevant information that comes as a result of reasoning and supporting opinions with evidence. Ennis (1989), another famous contributor to the development of critical thought, has argued that critical thinking is "reasonable, reflective thinking that is focused on deciding what to believe or do" (as cited in Fisher, 2001, p. 4). Both definitions are similar in considering reflective thinking as the basis for critical

thinking, but Ennis' definition is connected with the individual's ability to make decisions, which is not mentioned in Dewey's definition.

The Delphi report is a study that sets the ground for the definition of critical thinking, its implications and its impact on education. The research, headed by Peter Facione as the principal investigator, lasted for two years and included forty-six participants of the expert philosophers and scholars who participated in six rounds of questions to reach a consensus about what critical thinking means. According to Facione (1989, p. 2), critical thinking is considered as an essential tool in education and other domains of life where it is often used to denote creativity, problem-solving ability and reasoning. The consensus defined critical thinking as "to be purposeful, self-regulatory judgement" (Facione, 1989, 3), which means that the person should be thoughtful, attentive and demonstrate a logical interpretation of what happens around. This results in demonstrating the core critical thinking skills, which are "interpretation, analysis, evaluation, inference, explanation and self-regulation" (Facione, 1989, p. 5). The consensus also included a set of recommendations where it states that there should be clear instruction of critical thinking in order to help students foster the critical thought abilities (Facione, 1989, p. 16). Table number six in Facione's (1989, p. 16) summary of the consensus indicates directions on teaching critical thinking cognitive skills and implies that there should be occasions where these cognitive skills should be taught explicitly in different ways according to the objective of applying cognitive skills. It is stated that "teaching cognitive skills also involves exposing learners to situations where there are good reasons to exercise the desired procedures, judging their performance, and providing the learners with constructive feedback regarding both their proficiency and ways to improve it" (Facione, 1989, p. 16). Therefore, the direct instruction of critical thinking cognitive skills would foster the students' personal abilities to judge and evaluate their practices which leads to achieving higher levels of independence and proficiency.

This theoretical background regarding critical thinking is relevant to the objectives of my project. It is in line with what is mentioned in the Swedish Curriculum under the Upper-Secondary school commission where "eleverna ska träna sig att tänka kritiskt , att granska information och förhållanden och att inse konsekvenserna av olika alternative" [students should train themselves to think critically, to scrutinize the information and conditions and to realize the consequences of different alternatives] (Skolverket, Läroplan 3). The historical development of critical thinking shows how it is important to our students to develop their critical thinking in order to be reflective, attentive and active learners. It also shows the implications as students with active thinking habits can become active and thoughtful citizens

who are able to participate in making decisions and solving problems. Furthermore, The Delphi report is also significant to my project in identifying the core thinking skills that the students are expected to learn and develop in their studies. Another remarkable implication is to see whether the teachers in the English subject have explicit instruction of critical thinking skills in describing and explaining their correct use, in accordance with Delphi report consensus's recommendations.

In sum, the reason behind presenting all these definitions of critical thinking in this section is that I am interested in critical thinking and looking at its significance insofar as it relates to upper-secondary education and how the English teachers at Swedish schools apply it in their teaching. Therefore, it is important to present a historical overview to the readers in order to know where critical thinking came from and how it developed. Regarding the definitions that will guideline the interpretation of critical thinking in this project, it can be said that all the definitions that are presented in this section have something in common which is related to the logical thinking and developing thinking habits, but the definitions of Socrates , Dewey and the Delphi report have the major effect in conducting this study.

Research in the field

Research on teaching literature and critical thinking in upper-secondary school is extremely sparse, especially when considering literature as a means to fostering the students' critical thinking skills. The fact that it was difficult to find studies on exactly what I am searching is in itself important and worthy of note because this highlights the need for conducting more research in this area. It is more likely to find research on literature for developing the students' language skills or even critical thinking in relation to other fields of study. But finding research that is relevant to my research question was really hard and that is why the project includes three main studies in this field. The Delphi report is a research on the theoretical context of critical thinking and its implications in education which is discussed on the previous section. The other two studies that consider literature as a means to develop the learners' critical thinking are the most relevant to this research and they will be presented in this section.

In a study done by Tung and Chang (2009), the Taiwanese lecturers argue for the possibility of teaching critical thinking skills through reading literature. An action study was conducted in Taiwanese classes with non-English majors where the students were more inclined to focus on understanding the main action in the text rather than reflecting and

thinking about how and why things happen (Tung & Chang, 2009, p. 292). In this study, critical thinking skills were not explicitly taught to students as it was recommended by the consensus statement but rather embedded in reading and comprehension activities. The course of the study lasted for eighteen-week period and a variety of activities were included starting from The California Critical Thinking Skills Test measuring the individuals' overall critical thinking abilities. Tung and Chang (2009, p. 287) incorporated reading assignments, multiple choice quiz and language problem solving activities as strategies into the course design. In Tung and Chang's (2009) study, the in-class discussion about the literary works the students read was guided by Socratic Questioning skills to encourage the students to think more deeply and to help them bring to mind contradictory opinions during the discussion. As the goal of this study is to help the students be more self-confident when analysing and reflecting on reading texts, the students expressed the importance of developing critical thinking skills and "they acknowledged they became more comfortable with and confident in asking 'why' and 'how'" (Tung & Chang, 2009, p. 298). The study also focuses on the role of literature in fostering the students' critical thinking abilities and considers literary work an important factor in expanding the horizon of the student's perspective.

Another research study I want to address is Bobkina and Stefanova's (2016) where the authors intended to integrate analysis of Kipling's famous poem "If" as a means to help the students understand, explore and reflect on the world around them. What is evident is that the authors argue for the importance of reader-centered critical approach as a means of "encouraging observation and active evaluation not only of linguistic items, but also of a variety of meanings and viewpoints" (Bobkina & Stefanova, 2016, p. 677). It is also remarkable that developing the learners' critical thinking skills was based on a reader-response approach to a literary work where the students became engaged through being asked to relate the literary work to their own feelings and life experiences (p. 689). Having the New London Group curricular components as a starting point –situated practice, overt instruction, critical framing and transformation practice– Bobkina and Stefanova (2016, p. 692) piloted a model of teaching critical thinking skills and practised it in a workshop of a Master's course aimed at EFL/ ESL secondary teachers training. To assess the quality of this teaching model, the authors interviewed the students about whether the lesson plan intended to develop the students' critical thinking abilities which are "(a) the interpretation of the world, (b) self-reflection, (c) critical awareness, (d) intercultural awareness, (e) reasoning and problem-solving, and (f) language use" (Bobkina & Stefanova, 2016, p. 691). In the findings of the study, the students asserted that the activities helped them reflect on the world and understand

different interpretations because the issues were related to the readers' world (Bobkina & Stefanova, 2016, p. 691). It is even noticed that the study enables the students to create their own responses to the reading material and enhances their ability to justify their interpretations of the literary work (p. 692). An interest is also focused on the value of language in understanding the importance of the linguistic items and figurative interpretations to help the students achieve a comprehensive language learning (Bobkina & Stefanova, 2016, p. 692).

To sum up, although the two studies are not similar in their approach, what is relevant to my research is the use of literature as a means to foster critical thinking and the use of reader-response for developing these critical thinking skills. It is clear that the development of critical thinking abilities has gained an enormous value in teaching the English subject. In both studies, the teachers' main concern has shifted to promote the role of the student as an active reader in the reading process who is able to interact and question the texts, he/she reads. The main concern is not the "what" question but rather the "how" and "why" in order to equip the students in this world with thinking abilities to solve problems, attain a deeper interpretation of social issues, be able to evaluate and assess the credibility of different perceptions and opinions, and to justify with reasoning the various considerations and situations that come up in life. This is actually what literature offers to the readers and it is relevant to the aim of the English subject where teaching should give the students the opportunities to develop their "förmåga att diskutera och reflektera över livsvillkor, samhällsfrågor och kulturella företeelser i olika sammanhang" [ability to discuss and reflect on living conditions, social issues and cultural phenomena in different context] (Skolverket, Engelska 2).

The Method

For my research, a qualitative data was needed in order to answer the research questions through exploring the teachers' opinions and reflections about their experience in teaching literature in relation to using literary works as a means for helping the students be active and thoughtful readers. That is why a semi-structured interview with open-ended questions was the best approach for my research because my concern was not measures of values in numbers but opinions that could be represented in categories. Even though this type of interviews has a set of guiding questions, this format, according to Dörnyei (2007, p.136),

gives the respondent the possibility to elaborate and expand his/her views about the subject of discussion.

Before doing the interviews, I piloted my interview schedule with a peer and this was very helpful to take into consideration the reliability of the procedure. According to Bell (2005, p. 117), reliability means “the extent to which a test or procedure produces similar results under constant conditions on all occasions”. Although it was hard to make sure that the interview schedule would produce a similar result, I tried to focus on the wording of the questions, making them simple and clear as much as possible in order to expect a similar result when enacted on different occasions.

The participants in the semi-structured interviews were four teachers of English and the expected time for every interview was thirty minutes. The interview started with personal questions about practicing in the teaching profession and other subjects they teach besides English subject. Dörnyei (2007, p. 137) claims that answering these initial questions would make the interviewees “feel competent, help them to relax and consequently encourage them to open up”. The content questions focused on the teachers’ opinions about the role of literature in the classroom as a means of developing the students’ critical thinking skills. The content questions were followed by probes which, Dörnyei (2007, p. 138), described as “increas(ing) the richness and depth of the responses”. When the interviewees’ speech included important content, I asked follow-up questions in order to get more clarification and elaboration on the interviewee’s response.

When planning to perform interviews as a research method, certain ethical principles should be taken in consideration. According to Cohen, Lawrence and Morrison (2011, p. 77), an informed consent is one of the necessities for conducting social research and it has its origin in “the subject’s right to freedom and self-determination”. In my research, I informed the participants about the goals of the research and tried to offer answers to any enquiries. I tried to get an informed consent and assured the participants that “any person is free to withdraw consent and to discontinue participation in the project any time without prejudice to the participant” (Cohen et al., 2011, p. 78). I informed them also that participation is anonymous, and all information is confidential in order to guarantee the participants’ right to privacy (Cohen et al. p. 92).

In order to find teachers who are willing to be interviewed, I tried to contact schools who expressed willingness to host research conducted by students in the English subject at Örebro University. I sent emails describing my research and asking to put me in touch with an English teacher working in courses relevant to my project. Out of five schools, I received an

answer from only one school. But that was not enough to conduct the interviews. Then, through the help of my colleagues and friends and searching on the internet, I received many emails from teachers in English subjects in different parts of Sweden and sent them an informative email about my project. Then, when the teachers expressed their willingness to participate in the interviews, I emailed them an informed consent form telling them that the information they deliver is confidential, participation is voluntary and anonymous, and asking them for permission to record the interviews. I also emailed the participants the interview schedule in order to have better insight about the topic of the project.

As I intended to record the interviews as voice memos on my iPhone device, I managed to back-up this application with iCloud Backup in order to escape an accidental deletion of any of these important files. Another thing that should be taken into consideration is that the results of this study would not be generalizable due to the restrictions which made it a small-scale study.

After I had conducted the interviews, I started transcribing the collected data focusing on the most relevant parts for my project. I noticed that the informants answered questions that I had on the interview schedule but had not asked yet. That is why I decided to start categorizing in accordance with the questions that I prepared for the interviews. I read the transcribed data many times trying to find differences and similarities among the respondents' responses. It is at this stage that I managed to find out quotations that represented or stood for certain categories and put away those that had no relevance to the required category. I created categories in relation to every question so that the categories would be coherent and relevant to the questions and at the same time, I inferred some categories from the data that I did not plan to ask about. It was actually through the quotes themselves that I formed the categories because these quotations are the raw data that I had collected during the interviews. In the analysis stage, I managed to find relations, similarities, and differences between these categories and tried to find their significance and implication to the research question. In the analysis stage, I was completely aware of the fact that some interpretations could result in bias especially because my research was based on conducting interviews with teachers. Having a strong belief in the ideas and the argument that I would discuss in this research paper made me reflect on and question my interpretation of the collected data trying not to emphasize facts related to my opinions in order to avoid the dangers of resulting bias in the analysis stage.

A limitation to these qualitative interviews is that they were conducted during the outbreak of Covid-19 and the restrictions that were put in place, which meant that finding

English teachers in upper-secondary school to conduct the interviews was very hard because they were busy with online teaching. This meant that I obtained data from four respondents out of hundreds and this made me careful when reading my data because if my respondents shared the same opinions this did not mean that I could generalize my claims on teachers working at other schools. Due to these restrictions, the interviews were conducted online via Zoom as a live chat and I tried to take notes during the interviews. No ethical considerations were needed except for the correct conduct ensuring anonymity and confidentiality that were mentioned in the informed consent.

The Findings

The respondents in the interviews in this research were four teachers, two males and two females, who all had long experience in teaching English in upper-secondary school. Although revealing the gender of the respondents has nothing to do with the result of this study, it shows that the study has a balanced selection of teachers to answer the questions of the interview. The respondents showed a varied experience when they talked about their experience in teaching English. Respondent A had English as her main subject and had been teaching it for thirteen years. Respondent B had been qualified teacher in English and Swedish for twenty-two years, but he was teaching only English for the last ten years. Similarly, Respondent C had been teaching English for twenty years and had History as his other subject. The last Respondent, D, had been teaching English for fifteen years and she also taught French.

The study presented many findings. The respondents were asked for their opinions on the benefits the students get when reading literature. The general consensus among those interviewed was that literature is a means to ensure the development in language skills. “It provides linguistic development naturally”, was a sample response. Regarding other values obtained by reading literature, the interviewees acknowledged that it expands the readers’ knowledge about the world. According to Respondent B, it gives “general knowledge about societies’ past and present”. A similar response was given by another respondent where D indicated that literature is a journey that enables the learners to “travel somewhere else outside themselves, to learn about people’s lives in different areas of the world”. These quotations are related to the research question as the reasons behind teaching literature, which inspires the English teachers to take literature into consideration in order to achieve long-term goals.

One of the themes that prevailed at the beginning of the interviews is the view of reading as a challenge for both the teachers and the students in Swedish upper-secondary school. Three out of four respondents claimed that reading is a tough activity for many students and many students do not have the experience of reading a book. While A indicated that “getting the students to read is a tough one”, Respondents C and D reported that “students nowadays are not used to reading”. This why those teachers considered teaching literature difficult and a good adaptation of the reading material would be the kind of texts the teachers chose in teaching reading. This opinion about reading as something undesirable for the students was not declared explicitly by Respondent B, but in the same way he alluded to the importance of the types of books, as the other respondents, in order to achieve the desired objectives in reading literature. A typical response was “the challenge is to find books accessible to them, books of the sort they can manage to read and manage to understand” and “books that are challenging in terms of the ideas”.

Another category which emerged from the discussion about the benefits of teaching literature in relation to promoting critical thinking is the teachers’ intention to get the students to become better readers. For example, Respondent C said that “I want them to see something new, a new culture and a new angle to life, to show them a different perspective”. Respondent D admitted that because students are used to surface reading, they need to develop and “to be ready to see something different than what they think they know”. In contrast to these two quotations, Respondent B pointed out that reading literature “gives the brain a work-out, which, in turn, instils and develops the interpretational ability”. This implies that the teachers are aware of the importance of literature as a means to help the students be more critical and to foster the ability they need to read and to get the tools to be active in reading.

During the interviews, the meaning of the critical thinking in reading emerged as a main category where the interviewees gave their opinions about its implications for the students in upper-secondary school. The general consensus among those interviewed teachers was that critical thinking is major factor that helps the students think about their beliefs and assumptions to get new perspective about the world. Respondent B claimed that “the text will prompt thought processes the reader might otherwise never have ended up having, and ‘new thinking’ is always a potential for ‘new insight’ ”. This shows the new perspective the students get when they are able to assume different perspectives when reading a literary work. Another response was given by Respondents A and C where they claimed that critical thinking in reading is a kind of “thinking outside the box” and “thinking between the lines”.

These two quotations are similar in getting the students able to realize the big picture when thinking about the text while they are reading and in the importance of making them change their reading habit from surface reading to deeper interpretation in literature reading. The thing that is remarkable in B's response is highlighting the connection between the potential of linguistic expansion within the process of reading where B declared that "the more advanced one's language becomes, the more capable one becomes to also have advanced thoughts, especially lateral ones". This means that reading itself will help the students to be more efficient in assuming different perspectives about the situations the students meet in everyday life.

When discussing the role of questions to boost the students' critical thinking abilities, all the respondents emphasized its significance as a method in guiding the students in their reading and thinking processes. Respondent B claimed that it is important to ask them questions "that challenge their perceived ideas of the content, story lines, settings, plot, actions of the characters". An example of these questions is "why do you think what Y said could change the incidents at the end of the story?" or "what does this incidence in the story implies to you?" "could you come up with evidence about your argument?". Respondent B assumed that while the teacher might have a group of questions at the beginning of a discussion, "often times the students themselves have thought enough about a book and they want to create a discussion without me having to drive the discussion forward". Respondents C and D emphasized how it is important to ask the students questions that help them understand the setting or the context of the book. The respondents stated that "if they read novels, I ask them questions to understand the setting, the problem, in order to make them step into the shoes of the main character to understand what he or she is facing" and "what, why, who, and where are the basic questions when students meet a text for the first time". It should be noted that Respondent A gave a similar response and pointed out that "you need to give them questions that will awake their way of thinking in order to make them start thinking about the text in another way."

The role of discussion as method for helping students develop critical thinking is also prominent in the respondents' perspectives. Respondent B stated that "the most efficient way in helping young people develop critical thinking is through conversation", which means that critical thinking needs practice which makes the students ready to discuss different topics from different perspectives. In the same way, Respondent A claimed that "discussion is a way for me to start them thinking critically and get them more engaged in it". Similarly, Respondents C and D emphasized that book clubs are a good method to start the students

think and reflect critically on their readings “where they can share experience with their friends, and they may understand the book on a different level.” One thing that is remarkable in C’s opinion is that in order to make the students’ discussions more concentrated on developing critical thinking skills, it is recommended that the students read the same book and then “they would bring forward different interpretations and see other perspectives.”

The respondents’ responses showed a great interest in the students’ own views in interpreting the reading material. Two respondents, A and B, pointed out that “beauty lies in the eyes of the beholder”. In this quotation, the respondents mean that when students are reading a text or a literary work, they are asked or expected to bring forward their own interpretations because they consider the reading activity is a personal experience which is related to the reader’s own experiences and associations. This means, according to A and B, that even though a story carries a certain meaning, it is still a personal activity that awakes memory and different associations inside the reader. Therefore, the readers have the possibility to come up with different interpretations and expand their thinking horizons. Respondent C, when asking the students to think between the lines, he intended asking them questions that bring their personal expectations about the text. Respondent C claimed that “I usually ask students to put their own perspectives in the text, could this mean something to you or to your life experiences?” A similar response came from Respondent D where she stated that “the text has something to say to the reader and the reader’s experience is unique”. The respondents agreed that different interpretations are acceptable “as long as the students have a sense of reason for that interpretation.”

Teaching critical thinking skills is another category that emerged from the respondents’ opinions about the possibility of teaching these skills in the class. Respondents B and D expressed the same opinion about the importance of teaching critical thinking skills by making the students realize themselves how to do it. Whereas Respondent B claimed that “I get them to realize how to do it by showing them when I do it”, respondent D considered the “thinking aloud strategy” a good one and stated “I don’t mean to tell them how you should do, but if I show them how I do so many of them will think that is a good idea so let’s try that”. This what respondent D calls “modelling strategy”. At the same time, Respondents A and C shared the same opinion about teaching critical skills indirectly through formulating questions that encourage the students to “read between the lines” and “to look at the story from different point of view”.

The theme of the in-class practices or activities is a significant indication for promoting the students’ critical thinking skills. Respondent D claimed that the students can practise the

inference skill through the information presented within a text even though the text does not deliver a clear image about the setting of the story with the help of their associations and previous reading experience. D stated that “it starts to be a completely new experience when they started to look for clues within the text”. Respondents A, B and C agreed on practising the evaluation skill through the questions that are designed for the students’ assignments. A sample response was to encourage the students to “discuss what they think about the text, find the positive and negative, pros and cons.” The three respondents agreed on this statement on condition that students should argue and give reason for their opinions.

Discussion and conclusion

Throughout reading and studying the collected data, it became clear that the interviewed teachers have comprehensive awareness about the values of teaching literature in upper-secondary school. What the respondents meant by their opinions about the values of teaching literature is that it is a means of achieving the students’ full potentials, not only providing development in language skills but also giving the students the opportunity to learn to think about what they are reading in order to be good readers. This awareness guided the teachers’ opinions in stating how the students are expected to deal with literary works in terms of what kind of reading and thinking are required from the students in Swedish upper-secondary school in order to be critical thinkers. Although Respondent B claimed that the students need to challenge themselves by reading older literature because they have to be particularly good at reading between the lines, he argued that the students should read literary works that have a link with their lives and could evoke their feelings and associations. In other words, this is in line with Rosenblatt’s (1956, p. 69) perspective where the reading material should have “some link with the young reader’s own past and present occupations”. In contrast, Respondents A, C and D claimed that literary works that help the students be critical thinkers should be accessible and relevant to their level but may be challenging in terms of the ideas. Arguably, the reason behind this consensus is that those respondents agreed that getting the students to read is difficult. And this is why they manage to encourage the students to read through presenting accessible reading materials. Consequently, these responses imply the teacher’s responsibility in guiding the students to choose literature that creates this interaction between the reader and the book but at the same time challenges them in terms of the content. This is in line with Paul’s (1997, p. 6) opinion about the importance of teachers’ role in

choosing challenging and suitable literature reading that stimulates their curiosity and motivates their critical thinking abilities. At the same time, all of the respondents emphasized the importance of guiding the students through reading process in order to be able to facilitate this challenge and enable the students to construct meaning from the text in a way that fosters their critical thinking abilities.

As is mentioned before in this project, the concept of discussion is clearly emphasized in the English subject in upper-secondary school where the students are expected to “värderar, motiverar sina åsikter, diskuterar och argumenterar” [value, motivate their opinions, discuss and argue] (Skolverket, English 3). It is clear that the respondents held similar opinions about the importance of conversation and in-class book discussions in order to help the students see the literary work from different angles. This is clear in Paul (1997, p. 8) where book discussions are considered helpful in making the students “engage with the challenges of the text and reinforce the social nature of critical thinking.” As stated by the respondents, these conversations are driven by the questions that are formulated by the teachers forming a guideline for the students’ way of thinking about the text and understanding it. The questions that the teachers use in order to help the students think about the texts from different perspectives are similar to the ones used by Tung and Chang’s study (2009) where they argued for teaching critical thinking skills through literature reading. The respondents in my study expressed the value of the questions they formulate for the discussions in order to lead the students to think critically. While Respondent B argued for the significance of the questions that challenge the students’ preconceived assumptions and opinions, the other respondents emphasized the significance of the questions about the setting, the author and the characters in order to make the students probe a deeper understanding of their reading. I expected the teachers to call the questions they use with the students Socratic Questioning, but none of them alluded to this method although it is clear that they adopt this method in teaching critical thinking skills.

The teachers’ intentions to foster the student’s critical skills intersects with the questions that are formulated for the assignments. All the respondents indicated that the student’s own response is significant in interpreting and understanding the different perspectives of a text. While Respondent B argued that understanding and interpreting any text is subject to the readers’ experiences and subjective opinions, the other respondents stated responses that confirm the teachers’ interest in asking the students for their own opinion and their interpretation of the text from their own points of view. While Respondent C admitted that the students are demanded to bring forward their life experiences and their own personal

views while interpreting the text, Respondent D confirmed the significance of the students' own responses and preconceived ideas of the text because every reading is a unique experience according to the reader's associations and motivations in understanding a literary work. To put it in other way, the four respondents agreed that encouraging the students to assume different perspectives will lead to different interpretations of a literary work and this, in turn, will help the learners become more reflective and more critical readers who engage in higher levels of thinking in their responses. To put it in another way again, this is in agreement with Paul's (1997, p. 5) perspective about reading as requiring "active, thoughtful participation of reader to create patterns of meaning." The in-class discussions where the students come with contrasting and individual explanations of the reading material make the students active readers where they meet different points of views and make them reflect on other readers' expectations and rethink their own assumptions.

The kind of reading that can be inferred from the respondents' opinions is the one that engages the students with creating meaning through interaction and negotiating with the text. The meaning of a text is not something that already resides in the author's words, but something that is interpreted and constructed through interaction between the reader and the literary work. This is clear in Respondent D's claim about reading as a personal activity that includes the reader's personal curiosity and engagement with a text. Accordingly, this implies that to make meaning out of a text, a personal struggle is required in order to uncover the message of this reading activity. The respondents' opinions indicated that it is not Rosenblatt's (1995, p. 32) 'efferent reading' that students are expected to assume in order to develop their reading and thinking skills. It is, rather, Rosenblatt's (1995, p.292) 'aesthetic reading' that the respondents confirmed through their responses. The respondents meant that this is the approach that would help the readers to bring forward their associations, preoccupations and their previous reading experiences in order to create meaning through transactional or reciprocal involvement between the reader and the text. This, in fact, leads the respondents to acknowledge that it is not necessary to agree with the students' interpretations and points of view regarding the text. Since the reading experience is unique and subjective, various readers can create different interpretations of a text and all these responses are acceptable as long as the students can argue and show evidence based on the text. Therefore, the 'aesthetic reading' will enable the students in upper-secondary school to have a sense of awareness of responding to literature, make personal engagement in the reading process and develop the ability to appreciate multiple interpretations and reading experiences from other readers.

It is remarkable that the four respondents considered the in-class discussion and the book clubs the best way to teach students to be critical thinkers as this is where the students have the opportunity to bring forward their personal perspectives about reading a text and meet various interpretations and points of view from other students. What I have realized is that the critical thinking skills that are the core components of critical thinking are not in the minds of the respondents when they delivered their opinions during the interviews. Another realization is that the in-class discussions and the questions that are formulated by the teachers to guide the students reading and thinking process include an embedded practice of the critical thinking skills, which is not in line with Facione's (1989, p. 16) consensus on teaching these skills "by making the procedures explicit". Respondent D, for example, leads the readers through the formulated questions to explore the assumptions that are presented in a text, to see the significance or the implications of an evidence in a text, and to draw conclusions from the information presented in that text but at the same time taking into consideration the students' own opinions and associations when reading the text. This is a practice of inference, which is one of the critical thinking skills mentioned by Facione (1989, p. 5). The main focus here is not to read about the author's life and the time of the literary work, but the students' own inferences may lead their curiosity to get more information about the story and its context. Evaluation, according to Facione (1989, p. 5), is another critical thinking skill its practice is embedded within the teacher's formulated questions for the reading material. Many of the questions show that the students are expected to evaluate a text when being asked to mention the pros and cons, or whether they liked the text or not and sometimes to consider the strengths and the weaknesses of the text. This is on condition that the students' responses should not be completely subjective, but to base their opinions and reflections on textual evidence from the text itself.

I believe that these activities within the class can benefit the students in many ways. The students get engaged in being active readers where through associations and previous reading experiences would be able to train themselves to develop critical thinking skills. Through these activities the students go through thinking process and they become more independent in their way of thinking. The practice of the evaluation skill makes them think logically and present their responses and views in a logical way. Consequently, the students become more self-confident in expressing their opinions and learn to question one's own assumptions and at the same time appreciate other students' differences in opinions and views. It is clear that this shades the light on the practice of self-regulation as the reader gets the ability to self-correct one's own inferential judgements through reasoning (Facione, 1989, p. 5). Thus, this

is also in line with Facione's definition of critical thinking where the learners are expected to be thoughtful, attentive, have the ability to judge different situations and show a logical thinking and reasoning.

What surprised me in one of the respondents' responses is the importance of taking in consideration that the development of the students' critical thinking is a process that needs time. D realizes that since critical thinking has to do with thinking and expanding the students' thinking skills and their abilities to make judgements, to show logical reasoning and to rethink assumptions, it takes more time to see the students expanding their horizons and insight into new ways of thinking. An explanation for this argument could be that as a teacher, in order to notice the students' progress in their thinking habits, we should have to teach the students for longer periods of time, which is the case for teaching the students all the English subject courses in upper-secondary school.

The findings of this study are relevant to the previous studies that are presented in this project. Both of the studies in research in the field section of this project depend on integrating literature in the English language classroom as a means to foster the students' critical thinking abilities and the act of being active readers. In Bobkina and Stefanova's study (2016), their argument is based on adopting the reader-response approach to foster the students' critical thinking skills. Tung and Chang's study (2009) is based on reading literature and guided in-class discussions by the teachers' use of Socratic Questioning method where the students could share their thoughts and opinions. Similarly, this type of questioning is used by the respondents where through these questions the teachers lead the way the students read and think. Asking the students questions that are related to their assumptions and that requires them to probe deeply in the reading material is something similar between my respondents' opinions and Tung and Chang's study. What I have realized is that these questions are intended to keep the readers focused on the elements of thoughts in order to keep them focusing on interpreting, explaining and drawing conclusions about the literary work.

These findings are also significant to teachers of English subject in upper-secondary school. In the National Curriculum for the Swedish upper-secondary school, the kind of knowledge that the students are expected to develop during the period of their study is clearly specified. It is stated that it is the school's responsibility to let the students "har förmåga att kritiskt granska och bedöma det han eller hon ser, hör och läser för att kunna diskutera och ta ställning i olika livsfrågor och värderingsfrågor" [have the ability to scrutinize and assess critically what he or she sees, hears and reads in order to be able to discuss and take a

position in different life issues and valuation issues] (Skolverket, Läroplan 6). This statement is mentioned under “kunskaper” [knowledge] which is part of section headlined “Övergripande mål och riktlinjer” [Comprehensive goals and guiding Principles]. This is actually the core of critical thinking and this is how we want our students to be active learners, able to participate in decision making where they express their points of view about various issues through discussion with others, listening to each other’s perspectives.

It is through literature that the students have the opportunity to meet different life situations and personalities. Arguably, the respondents’ aim of literature classes is to develop the students’ reflective thinking. Given the chance to respond and engage freely with the text according to their previous emotions and preoccupations, the students may develop thinking habit that enables them to question and reflect on their own assumptions and their attitudes to different situations which may lead to reflection before making their own judgements or forming their opinions about life situations. Rosenblatt (1995, p. 217) claims that literature foster the students’ rationality where “the teaching situation in which a group of students and teacher exchange views and stimulate one another toward clearer understanding can contribute greatly to the growth of such habits of reflection”. According to Rosenblatt (1995, p. 215) this may help the learners to a better understanding of life and themselves, as they will apply this rational reflection to situations in life.

Arguably, the students’ abilities to contribute with their own points of views, their aptitude to argue with reasoning for their own ideas and the ability to interchange and accept other peers’ opinions should be developed with the help of their teachers. This tallies with Raines’(2005, p. 29) opinion about the educators’ responsibility to help the learners expand their knowledge through literary discussions. In other words, the teachers should strive to make the students open up and motivate them in order to learn to be self-confident and value their own judgements and beliefs. These two principles, the discussion with peers and the ability to appreciate other opinions, are valued by the respondents in my study and it is clear that the they made use of literature as a starting point for the discussion in literature classes. The thing that is realized is that the respondents strive to foster the students’ interpretational ability when asking them to relate the literary work to their own experiences and beliefs and encourage them to create their personal meaning, within the frame of the text. At the same time, the students will be encouraged to convey their interpretations to other peers and learn to listen to other perspectives and discussions. This relates also to Spiegel (1998, p. 46) when considering the reader-response approach as a means to enable the readers accept other responses and perceptions that are different from their own.

Due to the limitation of the number of the interviewed teachers in my project, it seems difficult to generalize that the reader-response approach would be used by other teachers in order to develop the students' critical thinking abilities and foster their interpretational flexibility. But thinking about my project and the responses of the respondents, it is clear that there is tendency by the teachers, at least those interviewed in my project, to adopt this approach in order to help the students flourish as critical thinkers and develop their reading habits.

As a result of studying the data collected in my project, I argue that in order to promote the students' thinking abilities in upper-secondary school, teachers should apply Rosenblatt's (1995, p.292) aesthetic approach as a method in teaching literature. This will result in having active and thoughtful readers who are engaged in the reading process and able to view themselves as successful readers when conveying their own interpretations of a literary work and accepting other contributions from their peers. In adopting the reader-response approach in literature classes, the teachers should strive to make the learners express their different interpretations without the fear of deviating from the interpretations of other peers because the learners are interpreting literature within the frame of their own personal and unique background. This is line with Raines's (2005, 29) perspective that the readers realize that the teacher is not "the ultimate authority" in expressing opinions and explanations about literary works. Therefore, the teachers are expected to guide the readers in the reading process and to support their multiple interpretations which leads to the readers ownership of what they read and getting a sense of control over their thinking abilities. An important quotation in this regard is Raines's (2005, p. 31) statement that "students must be allowed to take the ownership for their reading and thinking today if they are to be the critical thinkers of tomorrow".

This discussion leads me as a researcher to think about the value of this study in terms of how this study in a scholarly sense advances this research field. This research is based on the teachers' perspectives in terms of teaching literature as a means to fostering the students' critical thinking abilities. What I have realized is that although the teachers incorporate some aspects of literature that is presented in my research as the considering the importance of the students' responses when reading literature and the questions that the teachers use in guiding the students in the reading process, the interviewed teachers do not have the names of reader-response theory and the Socratic Questioning skill in their minds when they delivered their perspectives during the interviews. The respondents do not even mention or identify which critical thinking skills are expected to be fostered through teaching literature. This means that

the interviewed teachers have lack of knowledge in relation to the theories of literature instruction. That is why I want to highlight why it is important for the teachers to know the names of the theories and the teaching strategies when dealing with literature. The teachers' knowledge of the theories is significant because it implies that the teachers understand the different ways of implementing them, and when they want to develop and to further their way of teaching reading, they can go back to those theories and see how those theories are developing in terms of the way of implementation's forms in classrooms. In that case, the teachers are able to develop themselves further as effective educators through developing the reading lessons which, consequently, leads to developing the students' reading abilities.

Conclusion

The study has discussed the potential of developing the students' critical thinking skills through reading literature. It can be said that the method in this project supports the research question and helps in giving insight about the significance of teaching literature in upper-secondary school. Although the number of the participants in this study is not that large, their responses help to shape a good perspective about the efficacy of using literature as a means to help the students to be good readers and active learners. The study shows that the teachers are completely aware of the significance of reading literature in developing the students to become critical thinkers and readers. Furthermore, the study also gives insight about the importance of the reader-response approach in expanding the readers' thinking horizons and developing a sense of self-confidence in terms of having control over their abilities in interpreting literary texts and the sense of independence in the reading process when constructing a meaning of a literary work. One of the objectives of this project is to investigate the methods the teachers use in order to develop the students into critical readers. The study shows that the teachers adopt questioning skills and the in-class discussion as a means to achieve advancement in students' thinking, which enables students to reach a deeper understanding of their texts. Another important finding in this study is the teachers' embedded teaching of critical thinking skills, which comes as a result of the questions formulated by the teachers as a guidance in their reading process where they practice different critical thinking skills. It is also clear that the teachers' objectives in my study are to focus on the 'aesthetic reading' as an approach that helps the learners think critically through involvement between their life experiences and the literary work. This helps to develop the

students' reading habits that enables them to be active participants in making decision and giving voice to their opinions.

For further research, the study can be developed and expended where the students themselves and their opinions can be taken into consideration in order to get a broader perspective about their own experience in reading literature. Since developing reading and thinking skills is a process that takes time and it concerns the students themselves, I suggest expanding the research into a field study to investigate the students' interaction with literature and to explore the way the students create meaning in relation to their own experiences and personal background. This would return with benefits to the teachers when they would be able to reflect about their teaching methods which are used to help the students be active and thoughtful readers. Even the students themselves would benefit from getting the opportunity to think about the way they interchange their views with each other and also the way they create meaning of the literary works within the frame of their own associations and personal background.

I recommend that English teachers in Swedish upper-secondary should develop their knowledge and have more insight about what critical thinking is and its implications for the students. As it has been presented in this study, according to Swedish National Agency for education and the English syllabus for upper-secondary school, developing critical thinking is a primary goal of education in order to enable our students think critically and foster thinking habits. This implies that the students in Swedish schools are expected to be able to reason logically through presenting claims backed by evidence, to be open to all kind of opinions even to those that contradict the students' own beliefs and assumptions, and to be able to infer conclusions and produce interpretations from the texts they read at school. In order to achieve these objectives, it is crucial for the English teachers to have knowledge about critical thinking skills and how to apply them through reading literature in order to enable the students to become critical thinkers in accordance with the educational goals of the Swedish curriculum. I recommend also that the English teachers have knowledge about the theories of literature instruction because knowing these theories and their names indicates that the teachers know how they are implemented in the classroom and they are able to develop the teaching strategies and the instructional methods in order to achieve the best results in teaching literature. Accordingly, the knowledge of literature teaching theories would enable the teachers to develop themselves as effective educators through structuring and planning better reading lessons which, in turn, helps the students into becoming better readers and active thinkers.

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Appendix A: Informed Consent Form

Researcher: Obada Abdul Samad

Institution: Örebro University, School of Humanities and Social Sciences

Research project: “The role of literature as a means to promoting the students’ critical thinking-A teacher perspective”

Purpose: This informed consent form is for teachers applicable for conducting online interviews in relation to the research project mentioned above during the 2020 spring term. It has two parts.

Part 1. Project information (to share information about the study with you)

Part 2. Statement of consent (for a signature if you agree to participate)

Your rights: in accordance with the GDPR act, material collected will be stored safely and only for as long as necessary to complete the study; your anonymity is guaranteed. Your participation is entirely voluntary. You have the right to withdraw your consent at any time. If you have questions, I can be reached at obadasamad82@gmail.com.

Part 1: Project Information

I am conducting a study that aims at examining the role of literature in developing the students’ critical thinking abilities. The project also aims to investigate the teachers’ perspectives of the methods and the strategies the teachers use to help the students be active and critical thinkers. Another objective for this research is to explore whether the reader-response approach leads to fostering the students’ thinking skills as active and critical readers.

To this end, I would like to

- Collect voice recordings and transcripts of the interviews with the teachers and
- analyse the transcript of the interviews.

All data collected will be encoded to protect your identity. Names and other identifying marks will be removed.

Part 2: Statement of Consent

I have been asked to participate in a study conducted by Obada Abdul Samad, student at Örebro University, that includes participating in thirty minutes interview, voice recordings, transcribing the interviews, and analysing the transcripts. I have been provided with the name of the researcher who can be contacted in the event that I have any questions.

I consent voluntarily to this data collection. I understand that I can withdraw my consent at any time.

I agree/ don't agree to participate in the above study.

Name (print): _____

Signature: _____ Date(year/Month): _____

Appendix B: Interview Guide

Research question: Do teachers in Swedish upper-secondary school integrate literature into the English subject as a means to foster the students' critical thinking abilities? The objective of the project is to investigate the teachers' perspectives of methods or strategies they use in order to help students develop critical thinking. Another objective is to highlight the significance of the reader-response approach in fostering the students' critical thinking.

I intend to conduct semi-structured interview to get insight into teachers' perspectives and experiences in teaching literature and critical thinking skills. The critical thinking skills that are highlighted in this research are interpretation, analysis, evaluation, inference, explanation, and self-regulation.

Background questions:

How long have you been teaching English?

Do you teach other subjects than English?

Core questions:

1. What do students benefit from studying literature in relation to promoting critical thinking according to your experience in teaching literature in English Subject?
2. When planning for literature class, what things do you consider when choosing a literary work for the students? Can you give examples?
3. Can you tell me what engaging critically with a text means in your opinion?
4. Many scholars have argued that teaching literature can foster the students' critical thinking skills. In your experience has this been the case? can you give any examples?
5. "Thinking is driven by questions" (Elder & Paul, 1998, p. 297). In your opinion, what kind of questions do you think that the students need in order to reflect critically on a text?
6. When planning literature lessons, do you think that you integrate teaching critical thinking skills in your lessons? If yes, how?
7. When reading literary work, how can the students' own responses and engagement in interpreting and understanding the text contribute to developing their critical thinking skills?
8. Which in-class activities are helpful to facilitate the students' critical thinking abilities in relation to the reader response? Can you provide any examples?

9. Finally, would you like to add something I forgot to ask about?

Appendix C: Interview 1

The interviewed teacher is called A, and the interviewer is called I.

1. **A:** When it comes to critical thinking, I always try to encourage them to do, I ask them to write your personal view of this, find the things that are relevant, interesting., encourage them to look at things from different perspective.

2. **A:** To choose literature that is not that difficult depending on how well they know English, but I try to choose different texts that I find relevant for their level, but also interesting for them because getting the students to read today is tough one. (some students say they have never ever read a book). (Pause)

I: What do you mean by interesting? I Try to pick a book that could wake up a little spark for something. I also ask them to write a book journal where they read a chapter and then they have to write down about this chapter and I give them some guidelines on the board I want them to focus on. It is about words and vocabulary, but I always add what do you think about it, what do you find positive negative, pros and cons ,what surprised you.

I: In your opinion, help them in relation to critical thinking?

A: This will help them to view the text from different angel, from an investigating view.

3. **A:** I definitely feel when you are thinking outside the box, it is so interesting because if you awake their way of thinking, I think the way I put my questions or the way I formulate them is of course a way of making them think critically. It is up to me how I make the questions. Then when you discuss the text , you have to lead them a little bit in text discussion. You ask them to write their response in written form about the text and you ask follow-up questions. So, it is really good to talk about literature and I try to get them to stop and discuss .

I: Can you give an example from your experience?

A: A book like animal farm we had som really tough discussions because underneath all the things that happen with the animals they could see parallel society (this is not about animal but society) and they reacted and they told some really interesting things, but then of course when you read any other text even though non-political text, of course it is important to view it critically too and see who is the author?, (pause) where does the author come from?, and in scientific texts it is important to talk about sources too. When we read old literature of course it is important to guide them a little bit, even though we wish to be able to think by themselves, but they are not that mature. Some of them are amazing and can really be more

mature than older people. So, it is an individual issue, your background, what you are discussing at home.

4. **A:** I can definitely say that students practice their critical thinking skills, those who are able to think critically they see different details, they discuss the text from different angles. But those who are not used to read, it is so wonderful when you through your questions by a sort of forcing them to read, and when I pick books that are not common so they cannot find reviews or can't see a movie before writing. That is why I pick books that are not well known. And when they experience reading the whole book, they get excited and they start ask questions, discuss what they have read, and it gets interesting. So, you have to awake their interest.

5. **A:** You definitely have to ask them to view it from other perspectives, they don't automatically do that. You have to ask them and encourage them, lead them a little bit, to give an example of another way of viewing a text. It is not only reading the text and answering the questions. You need to give them questions that will awake their way of thinking in order to make them start thinking about the text in another way. One might think of individual cases and family background and reading habits that might be helpful to develop critical thinking by themselves.

6. **A:** I have questions that I call them "read between the lines". Through formulating questions that guide them read between the lines.

7. **A:** It is always the reader's response, it is in the eye of the beholder. And sometimes the skolverket and in the national tests when students are asked to read a text and answer questions, then we see so many different answers which are so relevant and good and even skolverket say that there is no right answer. So I think always when it comes to texts it is a little bit personal and it is always in the eye of the beholder, depending on the individual, it awakes memory inside you and you can connect it with other incidents that other people don't, and you can come with your own answer or interpretation.

8. **A:** Through my questions and my guidelines they know what I want them to focus on when they read. And often I ask to get them in written form but we also have discussions and sometimes I have small seminar groups and sometimes I let the students be responsible for those seminars but it is more me guiding them because I want them to discuss certain questions during that seminar and then I can pick few things that I would say is a way for me to start them critical thinking or get them more engaged in it. Sometimes the students background would let them flow and they are into that because of their background and their earlier experiences.

A: To summarize: you have to lead them a little bit, to structure and point on what the focus should be on. Then try to open up and ask them to respond. Make a statement and then see if they dare to question it

But the main point is that you can't do the same way with all groups, u have to be flexible and of course it is really tough with new groups, u start out, try some things and then u have to change ur methods a little bit.

A's comments: This is very interesting , it makes me reflect about my own teaching and pay attention to things that should be done in a better way than I do.

Appendix D: Interview 2

The interviewed teacher is called B, and the interviewer is called I.

1.B: The benefits of teaching literature in relation to promoting critical thinking reading always gives the brain a work-out, which, in turn, instils and develops interpretational flexibility. and with good language skills and this flexibility you are able to think much better, and if you make ur brain more efficient and effective then your ability to think critically becomes a little bit more objective. This means that in order to be critical in mind you need to be able to assume different perspectives and reading provides them with the tools for developing the brain into seeing more perspectives.

2. B: Teenagers living in Sweden right now the best type of literature to get them to increase their CT is lit that is about relationships. They love reading stories about young people and drama about moral or ethical dilemma. So those types of books always work. In order to flourish as a critical thinker as a young person in Swedish schools , you need to be able to feel that they connect to story and characters and the events. That is why older literature always gives a challenge because the students are not particularly good at reading between the lines. I prefer to have the students to challenge themselves by trying to older literature because it is very developmental.

I: Do the students read collectively in literature classes?

B: I try to make them read collectively, but also within the confines of every course the get to choose individually .(focusing on short stories for the collective and, works that have possibility for different interpretations). Since English is all about developing your language skills, I think it works better to let them pick their own books.

3. B: Basically, it means that students are able to assume different perspectives, to discuss their books the pros and cons or the good and the bad without being allowed to say what their opinions are. You should not include your opinions about the book because you should talk about the strengths and weaknesses of it and at the end of it you can tell people what u thought of it. This helps them to look from different perspectives. To be able to look at text from different perspective is the key to CT.

4. B: (Pause). I think that I have already answered this question in the previous one.

5. B: I think that students need questions that challenge their preconceived ideas of the content, story lines, setting, plot, actions of the characters, language representations.

I: Can you give example of challenging questions?

B: Questions such as why do you think what y said could change the incidents at the end of the story? Or what does this incidence in the story implies to you? Or could you come up with evidence about your argument? I think that these are the questions that the students need in order to help the think critically.

I: In your opinion, should the teacher guide the students in asking them questions or should they be able to come up with these questions by themselves?

B: I think it depends on the group. The students preconceived ideas dictate how and what they might be wondering about a text and how to look at a text. Often times the students themselves have thought enough about a book and they want to create a discussion without me having to drive the discussion forward. Sometimes I have a group of questions at the beginning of the discussion.

6. B: I teach them when there is a need, to write stuff on the board many times, it is much better to make them realize by themselves how they have to do it rather me saying say this or look at that. I get them to realize how to do it by showing them when I do it.

7. B: If a person writes a story that person definitely intends for the story to carry a certain meaning. But the person who writes a story cannot take precedence on the perceived meaning of the story because beauty lies in the eyes of the beholder. And if you take a book and put it into a context where people are very different from the context the book was created in then obviously, they are going to have different perceptions of it. I always allow students to feel that whatever interpretations they have are also fine as long as they are not completely incorrect.

8. B: The most efficient way in helping young people develop critical thinking is through conversation. Critical thinking is something you only be good at by means of practice which makes the students better equipped in situations similar to that.

I: You have already mentioned “comparison discussion” could you please clarify what does it mean? Comparison discussions, when students read different books and thy compare their book about structure, the era, try to fond differences and similarities.

You mentioned progress report during the reading process can be written or oral. I post 3 questions in the middle of reading a book they answer it orally or in a written form. But usually it is more commonly oral than written because it is in the middle of a process where I invite them to sit in groups and ask them to tell each other about their books and about the expectations at the end of their books.

Appendix E: Interview 3

The interviewed teacher is called C, and the interviewer is called I.

1. C: Students nowadays don't read that much, they are not used to reading long texts so just bringing them a book or a long text make them develop new skills. It is a challenge for many of my students. So, the first challenge is to find books accessible to them, books sort of (pause) they can manage to read and manage to understand. When I chose books, I think that I want to give them a new experience and many students have limited experience of life, they often live within families and I want to show them something new, a new culture anew angle to life, to show them a different perspective.

2. C: It has to be accessible, understandable, not to bring books too hard or difficult or maybe too long. To avoid bringing books that the students will either not read it or will find a way to do it some other way by watching the film or just read half the book and then they stop. Students cannot keep the focus for too long: this is the problem.

3. C: (pause) I try to make my students think between the lines and the question would be: what the author really wants to say through the text or what is the big picture? And I usually have a question how can you relate to this text? How can you relate to the main character? Put your own perspective in this text, could this mean something to you or to your life? Or could you put yourself in this person's shoes?

4. C: When I teach literature, I usually form book clubs and let the students discuss their books, and (interviewee's voice is not clear because of poor connection) I intend not to sit in the book club because I want them to discuss from their point of views and not to say things I want to hear. Then I sit in one of the book clubs and hear who is bringing forward new ideas or just listening.

I: Do you try to interfere with your opinion and ideas to guide them in these discussions?

C: I try not to say this is the way you should say it, but if a question comes up and they ask me I might bring forward my opinion. Usually I want them to form their opinions.

I: When having book clubs in literature classes, do the students have collective reading or do they read books according to their interest?

C: Actually, both has happened. To give you an example, (pause) in the first year, Book clubs can happen where 4 or 5 students read the same book as a group, they chose by themselves and inspire others to read it. And this doesn't mean that the whole class has read the same book. But in the second year, they chose their own books, and then they discuss in groups

each about his own topic. I think developing the critical thinking ability is developed when the group has read the same book, when they bring forward different interpretations and see other perspectives.

I: In your opinion, what is the difference between both cases?

C: When they read different books, the discussion would become more of different techniques, structure of the text, the themes = more technical questions.

5. C: Questions that are helpful to understand the concept or the setting of the book. If you read a historical novel, you have to understand the setting, the way people thinking at that time, EX. If they read pride and prejudice, and they have to understand the concept of sexuality, the women and men how they meet and talk and what this really means at that time, because people today are watching paradise hotel, and this is completely different (laughing). If they read novels where people at that time have social issues, drug problems, so I try to make them understand the setting, the problem, to step into the shoes of the main character to understand what he or she is facing.

I: Do u encourage students to read about the author's life, the context of the story, or they should come with their own inferences about this period from their readings?

C: When we work with famous authors and we read only short parts of the book, we usually read about the author beforehand and try to understand what issues come in the story.

6. C: I don't think that I emphasize on teaching these skills, it is like I bring forward questions that like look at this story from this point of view, but not teaching them.

7. C: (pause). I think that I want my students to make their own opinion about the work and usually the last part of a literary discussion is what did u think about the book? What did u learn? So, I think I start from the reader interpretation or point of view. Which implies that different interpretations are acceptable in the class. I ask them: what is ur opinion? And can you argue for your opinion? That is the most important part. There is no need to agree with the students' opinions, but I see their point of view and they can argue for it. When they argue for their opinions, they cannot be that subjective because they have to give me reasons from the book.

8. C: The strongest activity is the book club where they discuss the book with each other, where they can share experience with their friends, and they may understand the book on a different level.

9.C: Teaching literature is a challenge even among the students who have good grades because many of them, especially boys, haven't read books and they don't have the

experience of reading so maybe in future you have to help them to choose recorded books so they can listen to the book as they read.

Appendix F: Interview 4

The interviewed teacher is called D, and the interviewer is called I.

1. D: Not only language skills, but also, they learn about people's lives in different areas of the world. It depends also on you as a teacher how do you formulate the questions in the assignments. They can basically learn everything through literature. They also learn to read, and by that I don't mean decoding the words, but learning to think about what they are reading, students nowadays are not used to reading and they just go by the surface and they don't really try to understand what the text wants to say but they rather look for what they expect to find there. They can learn about the world, other experiences. They have to go on a journey, to travel somewhere else outside themselves. It is really a struggle to have them to do that because the text doesn't deliver the message to you, you have to work to uncover what is there. It takes a personal activity, a personal engagement and curiosity. You have to be ready to see something different than what you think you know.

2. D: I want them to be intrigued, I choose something that is a little bit surprising, fresh perspective or something that will be a meeting with something new. They should read other voices not only the first-person narrative, maybe it is more challenging with the third person narrative. I don't think that the work should be overly difficult because then they will have to struggle with the text. I would rather choose something that is easier but challenging in terms of ideas. I want the text to be accessible to them. Of course, it is important to be exposed to language, but (pause)if it is too advanced, maybe they will be put off or maybe they will be ready to think about it but they will struggle to get a sense of the world.

3.D: Engaging critically means what are the values and the ideas that are expressed in a text. The time, the culture to pay attention to that. Sometimes the students expect to see their own world, values, culture in the text. When we read fiction, I always ask them about when does this take place? Where r the characters? Then it becomes like a puzzle to solve.

I: Can you give an example from you experience?

D: A text called "enchantment" it doesn't say explicitly where it is, but they have the names of the characters, food, professions of people, flowers mentioned and when they started thinking about the place they expected to be in Africa. It starts to be a completely new experience when they started to look for clues. It about realizing that each text is a sort of puzzle. Students often agree that interpretations vary, and we get many different interpretations of a text, but there r still certain things that you can say about the text. follow

up question: do u recommend that students read about the life of the author before they read a literary work? Sometimes it is important for them to know something about the time, when the text is very removed from their world and it is completely incomprehensible for them. It is a balance between having them discover the text and helping them or supporting them. I think it is a good idea for them to have a hunch at least, but it is interesting to learn about what were ideas at that time, how the people live, to learn about the conditions of life, and where the author came from and what class of people or culture, religion, ethnicity. These things can help them. These things can sometimes be inferred from their reading, but not always. (Sometimes the students' inquiry and curiosity about the ideas and behaviour of the characters would lead them to read about the time and culture of the story and this is important). Both techniques are helpful.

4. D: It is difficult to see development in critical thinking if you have the students for one term. This is something that needs work on over time. In upper-secondary when you have the students for 2 or 3 years then this will help you realize their development. Since CT has to do with thinking, it needs more time to see the students' insight or any kind of development. Teaching close reading is good for critical thinking skills. It contains the key in order to start paying attention to the text.

5. D: what, why, who, where. These are the basic question so when you meet the text for the first time. We can start out by who wrote it, who are in it, what is the point, where does it take place.

6. D: I think it is important to do it explicitly.

I: Do you follow certain method or how do u teach them?

D: I think it has to work with the questions you give them to work with for the assignments. I think it needs a guide in order to be able to read critically, most students need a guide, I think. I think imitation is a teaching strategy that, the thinking aloud strategy, you show them or explain how u think about something, for example when I see the title of a book "enchantment" I think aloud in front pf them what it is, what happens when somebody is enchanted. I think about wizard or a certain state that is not a normal state and I try to know who is enchanted in the story. If I say to them that's how I think, to tell them to highlight things in the book, to take notes. I don't mean to tell them this is how u should do, but if I show them how I do so many of them will think that okay she is a teacher and she does that, maybe that is a good idea so let's try that.

I: (I try to summarize the answer and how students will start following her model. the interviewee calls it modelling).

7. D: Every reading is a unique experience. I want every student to discover the text on an individual level, so I like I when a student asks: what is the correct answer here for the text? And I say there is no right answer and you have to make your own interpretation or response to the text. So, the beauty of it is the personal discovery, the personal meeting with the text, I guess. The text has something to say to me and my experience is unique. Otherwise why would you read a work or try to understand it if everything is already discovered about it? I definitely encourage different interpretations at class. Their answers are acceptable as long as they have sense or reason for that interpretation. I cannot say that ur ideas are absurd, I have to take it in consideration and try to discuss the issue with the student.

8. D: The book clubs are good activities, but you have to guide the students through the questions they are discussing because otherwise it may be just be a sort of (I hated or liked this book) or superficial ideas.

9. D's comments: I liked the topic, challenging questions which made me think and reflect on what I really thing about these things in in teaching literature.