Teaching Literature in English at High School Level

A Discussion of the Socio-Cultural Learning Theory vs the Transmission Theory

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Abstract

This essay discusses if teaching English literature in high school classes, in accordance with the socio-cultural learning theory, can be considered to promote language learning substantially better than teaching English literature in accordance with the transmission theory. This essay also investigates and compares how well teaching English literature, in accordance with each of these two learning theories, fulfills stipulations in the Swedish National Curriculum for high school courses English 5, 6 and 7. In order to show differences between the socio-cultural learning theory and the transmission theory there are presentations and discussions of different teaching strategies and learning tasks/exercises in accordance with each of these two learning theories. The base for argumentation in this essay is constituted by analytical and theoretical studies of teaching English literature in accordance with the socio-cultural learning theory and in accordance with the transmission theory. There are also theoretical studies of the Swedish National Curriculum (of high school courses English 5, 6 and 7) and previous empirical research and studies (which include teaching and/or language learning and the socio-cultural learning theory). This essay also includes a presentation and discussion of advantages and disadvantages for each learning theory.

Keywords: English didactics, Teaching literature, Learning theories, Socio-cultural learning theory, Transmission theory, Language learning
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Reading Literature, more than just Reading

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1. Introduction

When working as a teacher of English as a second language the main focus is to help students develop their skills in using the language in accordance with what is stated in the national curriculum. According to the National Curriculum, of Swedish high schools (school years 10-12) the aim of the subject is among many other things that: “Students should be given the opportunity, through the use of language in functional and meaningful contexts, to develop all-round communicative skills. These skills cover both reception […] and production and interaction” (Skolverket). The curriculum also states that teaching of English as a second language should give the students the opportunities to develop the following:

[…] Understanding of spoken and written English, and also the ability to interpret content. […] The ability to express oneself and communicate in English in speech and writing. […] The ability to discuss and reflect on living conditions, social issues and cultural features in different contexts and parts of the world where English is used. (Skolverket)

According to the Swedish National Curriculum, for high school courses English 5, 6, and 7, English literature shall be included in teaching English as a second language (Skolverket). There are several ways for a teacher to do this. Almost any learning task could be adapted in order to be used in accordance with any learning theory. What makes the difference is how the teacher decides to get the work done, what a teacher expects of the students, how the learning tasks/exercises are introduced and carried out and in what kind of surrounding environment, the atmosphere in the classroom. “Teaching is a theoretical act, and theories – whether explicitly or implicitly held – have powerful effects on what we do, how we do it, and how we determine if we are successful” (Beach, Appleman, Hynds & Wilhelm, 2011, p. 6).

When I myself have been teaching English as a second language (school years 7-9 and 10-12) and worked with English literature (such as novels, short stories, poetry and drama) in the classroom, I have found that many of the students seem to think that it has been a good way to work. Some students, who at first not seem to care at all about what we have been doing in the classroom, suddenly start to work really well when they get to work with English literature, especially with one of the tasks. Some students have even told me that they felt they learned a lot by working in this way. Of course there probably are students who do not think it is so
much fun, but at least I have not heard any loud complaints about the exercises and learning tasks I have presented in my classes so far. To see students make progress in their learning of English as a second language (and to see the students who at first did not even bother to attend all classes start coming to class and start working) gives me as a teacher a very positive feeling about my job. It also makes me curious of what it is about this way of using English literature that so far has given these positive results. When reading the reference literature for this essay I realized that most of the ways I choose to work go along with the socio-cultural learning theory. Through a pilot study, prior to writing this essay, I found out that other teachers (but not everyone) at the same school also seem to let their students work with tasks that go along with the socio-cultural learning theory.

This essay includes a short presentation of what is stated in the Swedish National Curriculum about the use of English literature in high school courses English 5, 6 and 7. Thereafter is a short presentation of the socio-cultural learning theory and the transmission theory. Learning theories affect how a teacher chooses to work in the classroom. After this there is a presentation of three previous empirical studies with focus on teaching and/or learning and the socio-cultural learning theory. Two of these studies also investigate how well the socio-cultural learning theory promotes language learning in comparison with the transmission theory. In the appendix of this essay there is a more thorough presentation of some teaching strategies, learning tasks and exercises (which include the use of literary texts in English) that I have found to work very well in my classes. These examples of teaching (used for the discussion in this essay) mainly follow the socio-cultural learning theory, but will also be discussed in accordance with the transmission theory in the section of discussion in this essay. Reference literature, results from previous research and stipulations in the Swedish National Curriculum (for English 5, 6 and 7) will be used in the discussion of the presented learning tasks and exercises. In the discussion there will also be a comparison of advantages and disadvantages of the socio-cultural learning theory and the transmission theory.

1.1 Aim

The aim of this essay is to investigate if one of the two learning theories (presented in this essay) can be considered to promote language learning substantially better than the other one. The aim is also to investigate and compare how well teaching English literature, in accordance with each of these two learning theories, fulfills stipulations in the Swedish National Curriculum for high school courses English 5, 6 and 7.
1.2 Thesis statement

Teaching English literature in high school classes, in accordance with the socio-cultural learning theory, promotes lifelong language learning substantially better than teaching authentic English literature in accordance with the transmission theory. Teaching in accordance with the socio-cultural learning theory fulfills more stipulations in the National Curriculum in Sweden (for high school courses English 5, 6 and 7) in comparison with the transmission theory.

1.3 Method

The base for argumentation in this essay is constituted by analytical and theoretical studies of teaching English literature in accordance with the socio-cultural learning theory and in accordance with the transmission theory. There are also theoretical studies of the Swedish National Curriculum (of high school courses English 5, 6 and 7) and previous empirical research and studies (which include teaching and/or language learning and the socio-cultural learning theory). The data, in the form of previous empirical research and studies, was collected from the databases available through the library website of Högskolan in Gävle.

There are relatively few studies which include both language learning and the socio-cultural learning theory. According to Mitchell, Myles and Marsden (2013) there is a “research gap” when it comes to the socio-cultural learning theory and language learning. The language learning documented in socio-cultural research is often short-term, individual and local (p. 249). Cole (2014) writes in his report that there is no previous meta-analysis (before his) of how effective peer-mediated leaning is at improving English language learners’ literacy (p. 363). Cole (2014) also writes that “a number of researchers have argued that not enough experimental evaluations of intervention effectiveness exists in the ELL [English language learners] literature” (p. 365).

The search for data to analyze in this essay finally led to three reports of previous empirical studies, which could be seen as relevant, since they include teaching and/or language learning and the socio-cultural learning theory. These three reports/articles are first presented and then used in the discussion in this essay. In this essay there is also a theoretical study of the National Curriculum of Swedish high school courses English 5, 6 and 7.
1.3.1 Discussion of Validity

In this essay primary sources from previous empirical studies are relatively few. The examples of teaching strategies and exercises/tasks (used for discussion in this essay) of teaching English literature in accordance with the socio-cultural learning theory are given from the perspective of one teacher only. These two aspects of this study can be considered as limitations in terms of external validity. Therefore any conclusions in this essay shall not be considered as general absolute facts, but only as conclusions of the teaching discussed in this essay.
2. Background

2.1 English Literature in Accordance with The National Curriculum for the courses English 5, 6 and 7 in Swedish High Schools

The curriculum, of Swedish high schools (school years 10-12), includes English literature as a part of what should be taught in the courses English 5, 6 and 7 (English as a second language). “Teaching in the course should cover the following core content […] Content and form in different kinds of fictions […] Literature and other fiction” (Skolverket, Curriculum English 5). “Teaching in the course should cover the following core content […] Themes, ideas, form and content in film and literature; authors and literary periods […] Contemporary and older literature, poetry, drama and songs” (Skolverket, Curriculum English 6). “Teaching in the course should cover the following core content […] cultural expressions in modern times and historically, such as literary periods […] Contemporary and older literature and other fiction in various genres such as drama” (Skolverket, Curriculum English 7).

In the part of the curriculum, in which the aim of English as a subject in school is described, it is written that “Students should be given the opportunity to develop knowledge of living conditions, social issues and cultural features in different contexts and parts of the world where English is used” (Skolverket, Curriculums for English 5, 6 & 7). To read, analyze, discuss, listen to and write about different kinds of literature (such as fiction, short stories, drama and poetry), from the English speaking world, is one way to teach/learn about living conditions, culture and social issues in parts of the world where English is spoken.

2.2 Learning Theories

There are several learning theories which can be applied to teaching, however in this essay the focus is on the socio-cultural learning theory and the transmission theory.

2.2.1 The Socio-Cultural Learning Theory

The following definition of the socio-cultural learning theory is given on the UNESCO-website:

Vygotsky’s sociocultural theory of human learning describes learning as a social process and the origination of human intelligence in society or culture […] Vygotsky believed everything is learned on two levels. First, through interaction with others, and then integrated into the
individual’s mental structure [...] The implications of Vygotsky theory are that learners should be provided with socially rich environments in which to explore knowledge domains with their fellow students, teachers and experts. (UNESCO)

According to Beach et al. (2011) the socio-cultural learning theory describes learning as something social and the theory builds on the belief that people learn certain practices and tools and how to use these within a common community (which in school is based on the subject and class we attend). Beach et al. (2011) explain these practices by giving the example of the practice of greeting someone we meet (which is a practice that we once have learned and ever since then do without thinking of how/or why we do it.) When teaching in accordance with the socio-cultural learning theory it is important to create a community that supports the subject that is to be taught. The students are then to become members of this community and acquire the tools and practices used there while they are attending class. The teacher’s job in the beginning is to introduce and help students to acquire the practices and tools they will need in order to participate in the community of the subject they are learning. As the students learn they improve in how to use the practices they have acquired (Beach et al., 2011, p. 8-9). The main focus is not on the teacher or on the student, but on creating possibilities for the students to acquire the tools and practices they need by participating in activities in the community of the language classroom (Beach et al., 2011, p. 10).

According to Parker J. Palmer “good teaching cannot be reduced to technique; good teaching comes from the identity and integrity of the teacher” (qtd. in Showalter, 2003, p. 34). According to Showalter (2003), Palmer believes in “communal pedagogy and a community of learning that includes the teacher and the students” (p. 34). According to Showalter (2003), Palmer recommends that a space for learning is created in which there are both boundaries and openness and also a feeling of hospitality. In this space teaching should take place through questioning, but also because there is room for feelings (p. 34).

**2.2.2 The Transmission Theory**

The Transmission theory is an approach which considers the teacher to be the person who has the knowledge about something and through teaching transfers this knowledge to the students, who are considered to have no prior knowledge before coming to class and being taught about it. The focus is on the content of what is being taught (Showalter, 2003, p. 28). “Subject-centered theories emphasize content and information, often presented as the
“correct” answer” (Showalter, 2003, p. 27). The main focus of teaching in accordance with the transmission theory is on “how to best impart knowledge to students assumed to be empty vessels dutifully waiting to be filled up with the knowledge you provide them with through lectures or presentations … You then give students tests to see if they can replicate what you taught them” (Beach et al., 2011, p. 6-7). The focus of the transmission model is to know facts (such as genre, form, literary concepts, facts about the author). The focus is not on learning different skills such as how to interpret a text (Beach et al., 2011, p. 7). Even if a certain method for reading would be transmitted by the teacher it might still not lead to a deeper learning of how to interpret a text.

With this theory the teacher is in focus as the one who has the knowledge and this puts the students into a passive role, where they are very dependent on the teacher’s instruction (Beach et al., 2011, p. 7). Showalter (2003) quotes Paulo Freire to describe subject-centered theories (which is the same as the transmission theory) “education becomes an act of depositing, in which the students are the depositories and the teacher the depositor … Knowledge is a gift bestowed by those who consider themselves knowledgeable upon those whom they consider to know nothing” (p. 27-28).

2.3 Previous Empirical Research and Studies which Include Teaching and/or Language Learning and the Socio-Cultural Learning Theory

The following three sub-sections are brief summaries of reports on previous empirical research and studies which focus on language learning and/or teaching and the socio-cultural learning theory:

2.3.1 “A study of language learning strategy use in the context of EFL curriculum and pedagogy in China”, by Yuanfang Yu and Bing Wang (2009)

The background for this study is that in China there is a need to change the teaching and learning of English, from being a just a subject in school, to a language used for international communication (p. 457). In China there has been a tradition in teaching in accordance with the transmission theory with focus on knowledge about grammar and vocabulary, but not on communication (p. 464). This study was carried out from the perspective of the socio-cultural learning theory, with the aim to study the use of language learning strategies (LLS) of Chinese students of English as a foreign language (EFL), at the secondary school level (p. 457-458). The socio-cultural learning theory describes the LLS, used by the students, as tools constructed in the practices of the classroom (p. 459). The purpose of the study is to answer

To collect data for their research Yu and Wang used both quantitative methods (a questionnaire replied by 278 students of EFL at three junior secondary schools in Northeast China) and qualitative methods (semi-structured interviews with twelve of the students). The data was then analyzed in a way that made it possible to integrate the qualitative data (from the interviews) with the results from the questionnaire (the quantitative data) (p. 460).

The results of the questionnaire showed that students generally used language learning strategies in the form of memorizing, compensation and cognitive strategies more often than social, affective and metacognitive LLS (p. 461). Through the interviews, Yu and Wang found that the teaching of EFL in the participating students’ classrooms was not communication-oriented and did not give possibilities for the students to use or practice English (p. 463). The interaction between the teacher and the students was found to be very limited to routine questions and answers and there was no spontaneous, natural communication between the students or between the students and the teacher. In the interviews students said that they spend most of their time on learning grammar and vocabulary or to memorize parts of texts or answers to questions, because this is what is tested in tests given to the students. Some of the interviewed students also replied that they never or seldom speak English with anyone, because this is not tested and is therefore a waste of time (p. 463-464). According to Yu and Wang the methods for teaching, the learning context and assessments (in accordance with the knowledge-focused transmission theory) in the classrooms explain why students most often preferred language learning strategies in the form of memorizing, compensation and cognitive strategies (p. 464-465). Because of the need for students in China to also develop the skill of communication in a foreign/second language (which previously has not been in focus when teaching the language) the Ministry of Education (MOE) has developed new English Curriculum and Pedagogy Standards (ECPS), which have been implemented in both elementary and secondary education since 2001 (p. 457).
2.3.2 “Speaking to Read: Meta-Analysis of Peer-Mediated Learning for English Language Learners”, by Mikel W. Cole (2014)

This study is a meta-analysis with focus on examining how effective cooperative, collaborative and peer tutoring instruction are at improving literacy outcomes for students who are English language learners (ELL). The data used by Cole in this study was collected by searching in several databases for previous studies, appropriate for studying the effectiveness of peer-mediated learning. Since there was not a large number of such studies Cole included both quasi-experimental and experimental studies in his meta-analysis (p. 365). The data collected for Cole’s study were 28 samples from a total of 22 study reports (p. 369). The result of Cole’s meta-analysis study shows that “peer-mediation is more effective for ELLs than individualized or teacher-centered comparison conditions” (p. 358).

Peer-mediation emphasizes interaction between students and can be considered as an alternative to individualistic or teacher-centered learning approaches (p. 359). The peer-mediated learning is based especially on Vygotsky’s theories of socio cultural language learning and is a very different approach to teaching when compared to teacher-centered ELL instruction (p. 361). Cole writes in his study that “Previous meta-analyses of peer-mediated methods report consistently positive effects when compared with individualistic and teacher-driven approaches …. these meta-analyses … provide empirical evidence of the effectiveness of peer-mediated approaches with language majority students. Related meta-analytical research also suggests that peer-mediated learning might be effective at promoting both spoken and written language outcomes for second language learners (p. 363).

2.3.3 “Inclusive Educational Practice: Results of an empirical study”, by Torill Moen (2008)

This is an empirical study, from Norway, of a third-grade teacher’s job in a class of 22 pupils. Among these 22 pupils there were two pupils with “special needs” and one pupil with Norwegian as a second language. There was also a pupil with difficulties to read and write. This study shows how working with inclusive educational practice within the frame-work of the socio-cultural theory makes it possible for all pupils/students to participate in all activities of all subjects in school.

The focus of this study was on how the teacher approached the whole class and at the same time managed to deal with the “special needs” of two pupils (p. 59-60). Data for the study was collected through classroom observations (106 pages of handwritten notes and 32 video-taped
periods) and interviews with the participating teacher (all interviews were tape recorded and then transcribed into 184 pages). The interviews were held in parallel with the observations and video-recordings in order to hear the teacher’s reflections on the observations (p. 62).

The data was analyzed within the frame-work of the socio-cultural theory (p. 59). The study describes how the teacher used activities and assignments in which all pupils were able to participate. According to the teacher these activities needed to be both firm (in each activity there was no doubt of what was required of the pupils) and flexible (when possible, without disturbing the others, each pupil also had some space of his/her own) (p. 64-65). The teacher in this study also found it important that a teacher “sees” each and every one of all the children who are his/her pupils. To “see” the children means (according to the teacher in this study) that there is a mutual relationship between the pupils and their teacher. This mutual relationship is characterized by dialogues, interaction and communication. The teacher invited the pupils to engage and be active in conversations and to try to express their own thoughts. According to the teacher in the study, it is important to find out what the pupils think, because all individual variations, among the pupils in the class, need to be taken into consideration by the teacher when planning how to teach. According to the teacher in the study this makes it possible to manage to work with adapted education (p. 67).

According to Moen’s observations, one of the characteristics of this way of working in class, is membership (in the sense that all pupils are members of the class and also a part of the total environment in the class). The common pleasant experiences within the class makes it possible for the pupils to feel a sense of belonging to the same group (p. 69).
3. Discussion

3.1 Two Different Learning Theories; Two Different Strategies of how to Teach and what to Expect of Students

In the introduction of this essay I mentioned that almost any learning task or exercise can be adapted in order to be used in accordance with almost any learning theory. This was also one of the conclusions of the pilot study (presented in Appendix 2 of this essay). I also wrote that what makes the difference to this matter is how the teacher decides to get the work done, what a teacher expects of the students, how the exercises/learning tasks are introduced and carried out and in what kind of surrounding environment, the atmosphere in the classroom. In the following five sub-sections there will be a discussion of teaching strategies and learning tasks/exercises. Each teaching strategy and learning task/exercise will first be discussed within the framework of the sociocultural learning theory and then within the framework of the transmission theory. In the discussions of each learning task/exercise there will also be a presentation of which stipulations in the Swedish National Curriculum, for high school courses English 5, 6 and 7, are fulfilled within each of the assignments (within both frameworks of the learning theories). In Appendix 1, of this essay, there is a more thorough presentation of these teaching strategies and exercises/learning tasks, when used in accordance with the socio-cultural learning theory.

3.1.1 Teaching Strategies in Accordance with the Socio-Cultural Learning Theory

When teaching in accordance with the socio-cultural learning theory it is important to create a community that supports the subject that is to be taught. The students are then to become members of this community and acquire the practices used there while they are attending class. The teacher’s job in the beginning is to introduce and help students to acquire the practices and tools they will need in order to participate in the community of the subject they are learning (Beach et al., 2011, p.8).

In order to create a well working community there is a need for some common structures and ‘rules’ for all the members to keep in mind. To introduce a new course to a new group of students by letting them discuss what they think are the students’ responsibilities and the teacher’s responsibilities (as described in ‘Course Introduction to Students of English 5, 6 or 7’, Appendix 1) is a way to form the structure and ‘rules’ of what is expected of every member (the students and the teacher) in the community, which exists during the English lessons. The students know what the teacher expects them to do and the students know what
they can expect from the teacher. Since the students also get the chance to discuss the responsibilities of every member of the community they also have a chance to add what they think is important and also discuss ‘rules’ made up by the teacher. According to Beach et al. (2011) it is more likely that people will engage more in an activity if they also feel that they too have a chance to participate in the planning of it (p.10).

Through the introduction the students are also made aware of what is expected of them (and the teacher) in accordance with the National Curriculum (for Swedish high schools) in order to pass the course they are attending in the community (the English lessons). The students are also introduced to how the teacher plans to help them through the course (which opportunities there will be to acquire the practices and tools they need). To devote the first couple of lessons to this introduction (‘Course Introduction to Students of English 5, 6 or 7’) gives a platform on which a community, built on common rules and structures, can be constructed to work as a place where students can practice and develop their language skills.

Once the community (during the English lessons) is constructed it will be filled with different exercises and learning tasks by the teacher in order for the students to practice and develop their language skills in accordance with what is stated in the National Curriculum. When teaching in accordance with the socio-cultural learning theory, the main focus is not on the teacher or on the student, but on creating possibilities for the students to acquire the tools and practices they need by participating in activities in the community of the language classroom (Beach et al., 2011, p.10). To cover all the content included in the course there is a need to use a lot of different exercises and learning tasks, but the focus in this essay is on teaching literature in English.

In the end of each term the teacher holds a short meeting with each of the students. Before the meeting the students evaluate their own work and share their own experience of the English course by answering the following questions (first in writing and then by discussing it with the teacher): ‘What do you think works well for you in the English course?’, ‘What do you think does not work so well for you in the English course?’ and ‘What do you yourself think you need more practice of in the English course?’. This kind of evaluation is meant to serve as a base to build the discussion on between the student and the teacher during the meeting. This is a way to involve the students in their learning process by letting them express and discuss what they think about their own learning of English as a second language and what they feel they need to practice more. And as with the introduction (‘Course Introduction to Students of English 5, 6 or 7’) the purpose with this meeting and evaluation is
also to let the students feel they are involved in the planning of their own learning. It is more likely that people will engage more in an activity if they also feel that they too have a chance to participate in the planning of it (Beach et al., 2011, p 10).

To let students evaluate and discuss the course in this way is also an opportunity for the teacher to find out what the students think about the course. Is it too tough, too easy? What do the students wish to focus on in order to develop their knowledge and skills (improve in how to use the practices and tools) of English in accordance with the curriculum? Which activities, exercises and assignments might be useful to give the students in the class more opportunities to keep on developing their skills in the English language? This is important to find out in order for the teacher to work in accordance with the socio-cultural learning theory. The focus is on creating possibilities for the students to learn and/or to make progress in the English language.

When the teacher and students work in this way there are similarities to findings in the study “Inclusive Educational Practice: Results of an empirical study”, by Torill Moen (2008), presented earlier in this essay. That study shows how teaching in accordance with the socio-cultural learning theory makes it possible to adapt almost all exercises/learning tasks in all subjects, so that all students in the class are able to participate. The teacher in Moen’s (2008) study made sure all the pupils knew what was expected of them, but also wanted to give them some space of their own whenever this was possible. The teacher in that study found it very important to see each and every one of all the children in her class as individuals. She encouraged the children to participate in conversations, dialogues, communication and most of all to express their own thoughts. She found it important to find out what the children think, because this helped her to plan and adapt the activities and assignments in a way that made it possible for all pupils to participate (p. 64-67).

3.1.2 Teaching Strategies in Accordance with the Transmission Theory

The Transmission theory is an approach which considers the teacher to be the person who has the knowledge about something and through teaching transfers this knowledge to the students, who are considered to have no prior knowledge before coming to class and being taught about it. The focus is on the content of what is being taught (Showalter, 2003, p. 28). The main focus of teaching in accordance with the transmission theory is on “how to best impart knowledge to students assumed to be empty vessels dutifully waiting to be filled up with the knowledge you provide them with through lectures or presentations … You then give
students tests to see if they can replicate what you taught them” (Beach et al., 2011, p. 6-7). This could be considered as a more old fashion way of teaching, when almost every lesson is structured in the following way: Students come to class. The teacher checks that the students have done their homework (most often vocabulary and/or grammar). The teacher then tells the students which page they should look at in their textbooks. He/she turns on the tape/cd player and lets the students listen to someone on the recording who reads the text they have in the textbook. After this the students read the text aloud (either in pairs or by taking turns to read in class) and then translate the text into their mother tongue. The students are then told which pages and exercises they shall work with in the workbook (which consists of different exercises most often with connection to the text in the textbook). The teacher then either helps the students or instructs the students to correct the exercises by using a key with all the ‘correct’ answers. Finally new vocabulary (with words from the text) and/or grammar lessons are given as homework and will be tested the next lesson. At the next lesson the students will start working on the next chapter of the textbook in the same way and the exercises to that chapter in the workbook. This way of teaching was common until at least the end of the 1990’s (with reference to my own experience as a pupil/high school student at that time) and is still found in some teachers’ methodology (with reference to my own experience when I was working as a teacher who sometimes ‘fills in’ for another teacher, who usually teaches in that class. I then usually followed lesson plans planned by him/her.). According to Lundahl (1998) a lot of these activities are relevant when working with a text, but to have the same structure every lesson can make the learning very monotonous (p. 35).

Every now and then the students are given tests which are constructed by the authors of the textbooks and workbooks and this is a way to see if the students have learnt what they have just been instructed in these books. The teacher just teaches what is already planned in the text- and workbooks and gives tests to the students in order to see if they know the ‘correct’ answers. Students are not asked to share their opinions about the course in order to participate in the planning of any assignment. The teacher might still have a short meeting with each of the students at the end of the term, but in accordance with the transmission theory, this meeting would be to inform the students of their results and what to focus on. The meeting is not intended as an evaluation and a discussion.

To work in the way just described has many similarities with the findings presented in the report “A study of language learning strategy use in the context of EFL curriculum and pedagogy in China”, by Yuanfang Yu and Bing Wang (2009): The research and study of three
secondary schools in China (where there is a long tradition of teaching in accordance with the knowledge focused transmission theory) showed that the teaching, and therefore also the students, focused on vocabulary and grammar and on memorizing parts of texts. This was done in order to get good results on tests. Through the interviews, Yu and Wang (2009) found that the teaching of EFL in the participating students’ classrooms was not communication-oriented and did not give possibilities for the students to use or practice English. The interaction between the teacher and the students was found to be very limited to routine questions and answers and there was no spontaneous, natural communication between the students or between the students and the teacher. According to the same study, this way of teaching and learning did not help the students to acquire and develop the skills needed to communicate in the English language (p. 457-468).

3.1.3 The Drama Exercise

3.1.3.1 The Drama Exercise, within the Framework of the Socio-Cultural Learning Theory

One important thing when learning literature is for the students to develop their ability to adopt different perspectives of characters or roles in a drama activity (Beach et al., 2011, p.11). Research has shown that the same skills are required for enactment as well as for reading comprehension because “enactment develops the ability to identify key details, plot sequence, character and character motivation; various relationships of details, ideas and events; the ability to discern mood, tone, and other constructs” (Beach et al., 2011, p. 164). Beach et al. (2011) describe role-plays as an important drama activity because it gives the student the opportunity to play the role of the character and act from that character’s perspective (p.166). The role-play described by Beach et al. (2011) can also be adapted to the drama exercise described in Appendix 1 of this essay (‘Drama Exercise’). In this drama exercise the students are randomly put in groups (4-5 students/group) and are then given the task to create a short role-play. In this exercise the students know which character they will play (although in a way they have chosen this by themselves) and they are also given some authentic material (for example; coins, a movie-ticket, tourist brochures etc.) which they are to use in the role-play. Each group is also given a problem (for example; a flat tire, you run out of gas etc.) to solve in their role-play. The rest of the content of the role-play ‘manuscript’ is all made up by the students. This exercise is also in accordance with what is stated in the aim, of the Swedish high school courses in English, in the National Curriculum: “Students should be given the opportunity, through the use of language in functional and meaningful
contexts, to develop all-round communicative skills. These skills cover both reception […] and production and interaction” (Skolverket). Showalter (2003) cites Kenneth Eble in her chapter about teaching drama: “There is little to be lost and much to be gained in using the classroom, when appropriate, as theater” (p.79). Even though drama is a good way to learn, teachers should keep in mind that not all students enjoy this at all. Therefore the teacher and the class need to come to an agreement of how to work and no one should be forced to participate if they feel uncomfortable about it (Parkinson & Reid Thomas, 2004, p.125). In the role-play, described in Appendix 1 of this essay (‘Drama Exercise’), the students are able to choose how much they want to participate, but preferably they should say at least one word. This word can be ‘Hello!’, ‘Yes!’ or some similar word, as long as they participate. (If they still feel uncomfortable with this exercise they are allowed to take the role of the director or someone else who is not ‘on stage’.) This exercise also gives the opportunity for students to talk a lot if they want to. Maybe their best English language skill is to talk and they too must get the opportunity to choose to do so.

Further on the class could continue working with longer dramas. These could either be created by themselves or be their own interpretation of an already existing drama. If the students would work with any of the classical dramas (such as Shakespeare) this would also fulfill the following aims of the Swedish National Curriculum for high school courses English 6 and 7: “Teaching in the course should cover the following core content […] Themes, ideas, form and content in film and literature; authors and literary periods […] Contemporary and older literature, poetry, drama and songs” (Skolverket, Curriculum English 6). “Teaching in the course should cover the following core content […] cultural expressions in modern times and historically, such as literary periods […] Contemporary and older literature and other fiction in various genres such as drama” (Skolverket, Curriculum English 7).

3.1.3.2 The Drama Exercise, within the Framework of the Transmission Theory

It is also possible to let the students work with drama within the framework of the transmission theory. In this case the content of the exercise would be stricter and not leave so much space for the students’ own creativity. Drama could be practiced by following an already written manuscript or dialogue.

Working in this way also fulfills the aim in the Swedish National Curriculum stating that “Students should be given the opportunity, through the use of language in functional and meaningful contexts, to develop all-round communicative skills. These skills cover both
reception […] and production and interaction” (Skolverket). But when following the transmission theory the students would not work with production and interaction by using the language in a natural way (through the use of their own language). Instead they would practice the language through a production and interaction which have already been made up by someone else.

If the students would work with classical dramas (for example written by Shakespeare), within the framework of the transmission theory, this would also fulfill the same stipulations as when working with classical dramas in accordance with the socio-cultural learning theory.

3.1.4 Working with Lyrics – an Introduction to Analyzing Literary Texts

3.1.4.1 The Lyrics Exercise within the Framework of the Socio-Cultural Learning Theory

In this exercise students are to work with interpreting the lyrics/song text of their own choice and then write a presentation of their analysis. The students will also prepare and give an oral presentation of their analysis.

Students are more likely to engage in an assignment if they feel they have the possibility to make some choices of their own. In accordance with the socio-cultural learning theory the students are to acquire the tools and practices they need by participating in activities in the community of the language class room (Beach et al., 2011, p.10). Working with Lyrics (as described in ‘Working with Lyrics – an Introduction to Analyzing Literary Texts’ in Appendix 1) is an example of an exercise which includes both the possibility for the students to make a choice of their own of which lyrics (song text) they want to work with, but within this exercise all students also have a possibility to acquire tools and practices that are useful for them in the community they are a part of while attending the English lessons.

With this exercise the students practice skills such as interpreting and analyzing a text, writing, building vocabulary, listening and speaking. Showalter (2003) writes that many teachers let their students work with lyrics of popular songs as a way to introduce them to poetry (p.74). When writing and talking about the lyrics of their choice the students also practice ways of how to express their own findings and interpretations in English. Since the students choose which lyrics they want to work with many of them probably choose a text that is meaningful for them. Besides the experience as a teacher of using this as a successful exercise (in the meaning of that this exercise usually gets almost every student to start
working, even if they have never showed any engagement in the subject before) this exercise also gives the opportunity for the students to work in accordance with what is stated in the aim of the subject in the National Curriculum: “Students should be given the opportunity, through the use of language in functional and meaningful contexts, to develop all-round communicative skills. These skills cover both reception … and production and interaction” (Skolverket). The curriculum also states that teaching of English as a second language “should give the students the opportunities to develop the following: … Understanding of spoken and written English, and also the ability to interpret content. … The ability to express oneself and communicate in English in speech and writing” (Skolverket). Depending on the content of the lyrics this exercise may also include the aim that students should be given the opportunity to develop their “ability to discuss and reflect on living conditions, social issues and cultural features in different contexts and parts of the world where English is used” (Skolverket).

The assignment, ‘Working with Lyrics’, is introduced by the teacher by showing an example of how to work with interpreting a text and how to look for symbols, and also what a symbol in a text is. The students will then practice working in the same way with the lyrics of their choice. According to the socio-cultural learning theory this kind of introduction is a way to model the use of the practices the students need to complete the assignment given to them in the community (Beach et al., 2011, p.9). According to Showalter (2003) students will learn better if the teacher both explains and shows examples of what skills we want them to develop (p. 55). When practicing looking for symbols the students are also learning to look for a meaning behind the literal meaning of the word. They need to figure out if there is a larger meaning behind that one word that they think is a symbol (Beach et al., 2011, p.13). The assignment is also intended to let students practice how to quote words and phrases from the lyrics in order to support and explain their own interpretation of the lyrics. It is important for the students to know that there are no right answers to an interpretation of a text. Just like Parkinson & Reid Thomas (2004) write: “There is no one correct answer, but this does not mean that anything goes” (p. 6). Instead students should use quotes from the text and support the arguments they have made in their interpretations.

3.1.4.2 The Lyrics Exercise within the Framework of the Transmission Theory

If this exercise was adapted to be used in accordance with the transmission theory all students would probably be working with the same song, chosen by the teacher. The students would not work with giving their own interpretation of the content of the lyrics, but instead be
asked to answer questions which would already have a given answer (which the student is expected to give). Working with the exercise in this way would mainly fulfill the following stipulations of the National Curriculum: teaching of English as a second language “should give the students the opportunities to develop the following: … Understanding of spoken and written English” (Skolverket). Depending on the content of the lyrics this exercise may also include the aim that students should be given the opportunity to develop their “ability to discuss and reflect on living conditions, social issues and cultural features in different contexts and parts of the world where English is used” (Skolverket). Although within the framework of the transmission theory the discussion and reflection would probably be carried out with the teacher as the leader of the discussion.

3.1.5 Reading Literature, more than just Reading

Most of the teachers (who participated in the pilot study presented in Appendix 2) replied that they give their students the exercise to read a novel, at least once in every English course. The students are then usually given some kind of exercise or task connected to their reading of a novel. The exercise/learning task can for example be to write a book review, to participate in some kind of a discussion about the book or prepare a presentation about the book.

3.1.5.1 Reading and Working with Literature in Accordance with the Socio-Cultural Learning Theory

In this essay there is an example of a learning task called ‘Reading Literature, more than just Reading’. (A more thorough presentation of this learning task is given in Appendix 1) One aim with this task is to practice reading in English. This gives opportunities for the student to practice reading comprehension, develop and extend his/her vocabulary and grammar (maybe sometimes even without thinking about practicing these skills if the student finds the story interesting). If the students find the story interesting it is also an opportunity to develop their receptive skills of reading in the English language through a meaningful context, which is one of the aims of the subject English according to the National Curriculum of Swedish high schools (Skolverket). Depending on the content of the literary text this reading task may also fulfill the following stipulation of the Swedish National Curriculum: “Students should be given the opportunity to develop knowledge of living conditions, social issues and cultural features in different contexts and parts of the world where English is used” (Skolverket, Curriculums for English 5, 6 & 7).
For this learning task students most often have the opportunity to choose which novel they want to read (or if, for some reason, it is difficult for a student to read long texts, it is also possible to choose novels adapted to Easy Readers or a short story). The students are also encouraged to search for another book if they for some reason do not like the book they have started on. According to Beach et al. (2011) the fact that students can make their own choices of books encourages them more to read the text/book than if they have been assigned to read a certain text or book. But students also have to practice to start reading a text and then reject it if they do not like it (p. 49).

Another aim with the learning task ‘Reading Literature, more than just Reading’ is to let the students practice how to focus on their own reading experience and express their own feelings, opinions and thoughts about the novel/short story, rather than focusing only on the story of the novel/short story. This aim is also in accordance with what is stated in the aim of the subject English in the National Curriculum, of Swedish high schools: the teaching of English as a second language “should give the students the opportunities to develop the following: […] Understanding of […] written English, and also the ability to interpret content. […] The ability to express oneself and communicate in English in […] writing” (Skolverket). For the reader to practice paying attention to what feelings and thoughts that he/she gets when reading a text is a way to develop his/her reading strategies (Beach et al., 2011, p. 122). A good example of how to practice this is to let the students work with think-alouds. A way for the teacher to introduce this to the students is to model the strategies of how to focus on what they are doing and noticing and their thoughts and feelings when reading (their reading experience) rather than just focusing on summarizing the plot only, which is what students sometimes want to do (Beach et al., 2011, p. 122-123). The reading task ‘Reading Literature, more than just Reading’ (described in Appendix 1 of this essay) can be seen as a way to practice think-alouds. To help the students focus on their reading experience, they get a form with questions, mainly about their reading experience, to fill in both while reading and after. Before the students choose which novel (or short story) they will read the teacher discusses the exercise with the students, gives examples of how to work with the questions and also emphasize that in this exercise it is the students’ opinions and reports of their own reading experiences which is most important, not the summary of the plot. Parkinson & Reid Thomas (2004) write “… if students know that their opinions about a book are considered important and actually make a difference to what happens, both the act of reading and the act of talking about a book should be more real, authentic and communicative,
and hence more likely to promote language learning” (p. 34). According to Barlow (2009) one of the most important skills for students to take with them, even after finishing school, is the ability to make their own judgements about books and authors (p. 27).

Beach et al. (2011) give the following examples of what the focus may be on in think-alouds (which can also be adjusted to questions found in the reading task ‘Reading Literature, more than just Reading’):

- Before reading the students can write down what they think the story is about just by looking at the title or skimming through the text (Beach et al., 2011, p. 123). In the reading task ‘Reading Literature, more than just Reading’ (described in Appendix 1) students are asked to write down their first reaction to the story.

- While reading the students can be asked to write down their thoughts when reading the text, what they find most interesting, what personal connections (or connections to other texts or the world) they can find. The students can also be asked to write down what they find difficult or easy while reading and what they can do in order to understand something difficult (Beach et al., 2011, p. 123). In the task ‘Reading Literature, more than just Reading’ students are also asked to answer the following: ‘Words to describe the book?’, ‘Was there anything you found confusing or difficult to understand? Try to explain what!’, ‘If you could be any character in the story, who would you be? Why?’, ‘Do you recognize or share any of the feelings of the characters in the story? Try to explain!’, ‘How does the story make you feel?’ and ‘Do you like this story? Why/ Why not?’.

In the assignment ‘Reading Literature, more than just Reading’ the students are encouraged to not worry about each word they do not understand and instead focus on getting into the story. (If a word seems important in order to get the meaning of the story they should of course search for the meaning of that particular word.) To not focus on the meaning of each separate word but instead on the meaning of the text is to develop the skill of reading in English as a second language. “Good readers do not translate an L2 text, even in their heads, but understand it directly … Learners at lower levels should be led towards this way of reading … and away from reliance on translation” (Parkinson & Reid Thomas, 2004, p. 28-29).
3.1.5.1 Reading and Working with Literature in Accordance with the Transmission Theory

When working with reading of literary texts, within the framework of the transmission theory, students can still be given the opportunity to choose which book (novel, Easy Reader or short story) they want to read. If this is the case, it is possible that the students find the story interesting, which then also gives an opportunity to develop their receptive skills of reading in the English language through a meaningful context, which is one of the aims of the subject English according to the National Curriculum of Swedish high schools (Skolverket).

However, the focus of the transmission theory is to know facts (such as genre, form, literary concepts, facts about the author). The focus is not on learning different skills such as how to interpret a text (Beach et al., 2011, p. 7). Instead of letting the students practice on focusing on their own reading experience, they can (for example) be asked to write a book review, in which they are to give a summary of the plot of the novel and then focus on things which are facts of a novel (for example form, genre, literary concepts etc.) or to write a presentation of facts about the author. These are all facts, which could be given as ‘correct’ answers in a test.

Reading and working with literature in this way fulfills the following aims of the subject English in the National Curriculum, of Swedish high schools: the teaching of English as a second language “should give the students the opportunities to develop the following: […] Understanding of […] written English […] The ability to express oneself […] in English in […] writing” (Skolverket). Reading in accordance with this theory can also fulfill the following stipulation of the Swedish National Curriculum: “Students should be given the opportunity to develop knowledge of living conditions, social issues and cultural features in different contexts and parts of the world where English is used” (Skolverket, Curriculums for English 5, 6 & 7), depending on the content of the literary text.

3.3 Advantages and Disadvantages of the Socio-Cultural Learning Theory and the Transmission Theory

The following two sub-sections include a presentation of advantages and disadvantages, with focus on the possibility to promote language learning, when teaching literature in accordance with the socio-cultural learning theory and when teaching in literature accordance with the transmission theory.
3.3.1 Advantages and Disadvantages of the Socio-Cultural Learning Theory when Teaching English Literature at the High School Level

Advantages:

- According to Beach et al. (2011), students learn how to learn the language. The teacher introduces and helps students to acquire the practices and tools they will need in order to participate in the community of the subject they are learning. As the students learn they improve in how to use the practices they have acquired (p. 8-9).

- Both the teacher and the students are involved in planning assignments. It is more likely that people will engage more in an activity if they also feel that they too have a chance to participate in the planning of it (Beach et al., 2011, p. 10).

- The teacher and the students form the community for language learning together. Through the introduction of the course (described in Appendix 1 of this essay) they create a platform on which a community, built on common rules and structures, can be constructed to work as a place where students can practice and develop their language skills. When the teacher and students work in this way there are similarities to findings in the study “Inclusive Educational Practice: Results of an empirical study”, by Torill Moen (2008), presented earlier in this essay (2.3.3). The teacher in that study made sure all the pupils knew what was expected of them, but also wanted to give them some space of their own whenever this was possible (p. 67).

- The teacher and the students work together in order to reach a common goal (that the students will be able to develop their skills (tools and practices) in the language and through this finish the course with a passing grade). Teaching builds on the students’ prior knowledge and interests, which will make it easier to learn because this has the potential to make the students engaged and motivated. According to Lundahl (1998), how much students learn, depends on the students’ interests and motivation, and the interaction between the students and between the teacher and the students, (p. 69).

- Teaching in accordance with the socio-cultural learning theory gives possibilities to adapt the learning tasks and exercises in order to let every student develop their skills with a focus on what they need, so that it will not be too easy or too hard. In Moen’s (2008) study, the teacher found it very important to see each and every one of all the pupils in her class as individuals. She encouraged the pupils to participate in conversations, dialogues, communication and most of all to express their own thoughts. She found it important to find out what the pupils think, because this helped
her to plan and adapt the activities and exercises in a way that made it possible for all pupils to participate (p. 67).

- Teaching in accordance with the socio-cultural learning theory includes the students’ reading experience, feelings, thoughts and opinions. Beach et al. (2011) discuss how to work in accordance with the sociocultural learning theory and write that for the reader to practice to pay attention to what feelings and thoughts that he/she gets when reading a text is a way to develop his/her reading strategies (p. 122). According to Lundahl (1998) it is important that students read texts which give them opportunities to express their own opinions, values and feelings. Texts which catch the reader’s interest, but also texts which state good examples of patterns within a language or texts that bring up other people’s living conditions, might lead to valuable conversations and different tasks which help the students to learn and/or to develop language skills (p. 43).

In Cole’s (2014) empirical study of peer-mediated learning (presented in 2.3.2 in this essay), which is in accordance with the socio-cultural learning theory, he writes that

> Previous meta-analyses of peer-mediated methods report consistently positive effects when compared with individualistic and teacher-driven approaches […] these meta-analyses […] provide empirical evidence of the effectiveness of peer-mediated approaches with language majority students. Related meta-analytical research also suggests that peer-mediated learning might be effective at promoting both spoken and written language outcomes for second language learners. (p. 363)

The result of Cole’s (2014) meta-analysis study shows that “peer-mediation is more effective for ELLs than individualized or teacher-centered comparison conditions” (p. 358). Peer-mediation emphasizes interaction between students and can be considered as an alternative to individualistic or teacher-centered learning approaches (Cole, 2014, p. 359). The peer-mediated learning is based especially on Vygotsky’s theories of socio-cultural language learning and is a very different approach to teaching when compared to teacher-centered ELL instruction (Cole, 2014, p. 361).

Disadvantages:

- There is not a strict structure which is repeated one lesson after the other. This might be negative for students who for some reason need a lot of structure in their lives.
(Therefore it is important that the teacher creates structure in every exercise/task and helps the students keep track of what they are doing and makes sure they remember to hand in their learning tasks. Without this structure the situation might be a bit chaotic.)

In the study “Inclusive Educational Practice: Results of an empirical study”, by Torill Moen (2008), the teacher used exercises and activities which were both firm (in each activity there was no doubt of what was required of the pupils) and flexible (when possible, without disturbing the others, each pupil was also given some space of his/her own). This made it possible for all pupils to participate (p. 65).

- In order to work with literature in accordance with the socio-cultural learning theory (as in the examples given in Appendix 1 of this essay), the students need to have acquired some skills and knowledge of the English language before coming to class. The students already need to know the language in order to learn it (Lundahl referring to Widdowson, Lundahl, 1998, p. 68). Therefore teaching in accordance with this theory might not work so well in classes for new beginners of English. (The focus in this essay is however on teaching literature in English at high school level and therefore the teacher can expect that the students come to class with some prior knowledge and skills in the English language, since they have already been studying English for many years in school.)

### 3.3.2 Advantages and Disadvantages of the Transmission Theory when Teaching English Literature at the High School Level

**Advantages:**

- Very much structure (Lundahl, 1998, p. 35), which can be profitable for students who for some reason require a lot of structure in their lives.

**Disadvantages:**

- Very much structure. To have the same structure for every lesson can make the learning very monotonous (Lundahl, 1998, p. 35). There is a risk that the students feel bored and not so engaged.

- According to both Beach et al. (2011) and Lundahl (1998), it is important to include the students’ personal experiences, opinions, feelings and thoughts in the exercises/learning tasks, because this helps the students to develop reading strategies and/or other language skills (Lundahl, p. 43 and Beach et al., p. 122). There is no
focus on this in the transmission theory (which focuses on the content of facts and information).

- According to Lundahl (1998) students meet a lot of the English language outside of school and therefore the textbooks and workbooks used for the purpose of teaching English need more compliments of other literary texts, which make it possible for the students to choose what to read based on their individual choice (p. 10).

The results of the empirical study in “A study of language learning strategy use in the context of EFL curriculum and pedagogy in China”, by Yuanfang Yu and Bing Wang (2009) (described in 2.3.1 in this essay) showed that the teaching (in accordance with the transmission theory), and therefore also the students, focused on vocabulary and grammar and on memorizing parts of texts. This was done in order to get good results on tests. Through the interviews, Yu and Wang found that the teaching of EFL in the participating students’ classrooms was not communication-oriented and did not give possibilities for the students to use or practice English. The interaction between the teacher and the students was found to be very limited to routine questions and answers and there was no spontaneous, natural communication between the students or between the students and the teacher. According to the same study, this way of teaching and learning did not help the students to acquire and develop the skills needed to communicate in the English language (p. 457-468).
4. Conclusion

According to the National Curriculum of Swedish high schools (school years 10-12) authentic English literature shall be included when teaching the courses English 5, 6 and 7. To teach literature in English can be done in accordance with many different learning theories. Each of the two learning theories presented in this essay has a different focus on how to teach/learn. The transmission theory puts the teacher in focus as the all-knowing whose job is to transfer his/her knowledge to rather passive students who, before having received what the teacher transfers, are assumed to not have any prior knowledge which can be useful in the process of learning. According to the socio-cultural learning theory the focus is on creating possibilities for the students to learn (to acquire the tools and practices they need and then improve on how to use these). Both the teacher and the students work together in this community (which exists during the language lessons) and are involved in the processes of teaching and learning.

The aim of this essay is to investigate if one of the two learning theories (presented in this essay) can be considered to promote language learning substantially better than the other one. The aim is also to investigate and compare how well teaching English literature in accordance with the socio-cultural learning theory vs teaching English literature in accordance with the transmission theory fulfills stipulations in the Swedish National Curriculum for high school courses English 5, 6 and 7.

All the examples of exercises and learning tasks (except ‘Course Introduction to Students of English 5, 6 or 7’ and ‘Follow up and Evaluating’), given in Appendix 1 of this essay, can probably be adapted to be used in accordance with almost any learning theory and the National Curriculum of Swedish high schools. What makes the difference is how the teacher decides to get the work done. What makes the exercises/learning tasks ‘Drama Exercise’, ‘Working with Lyrics – an Introduction Exercise of Analyzing Literary Texts’ and ‘Reading Literature, more than just Reading’ into exercises and tasks in accordance with a certain learning theory is how they are introduced and carried out and in what kind of surrounding environment (the atmosphere of the language learning classroom). The exercises and teaching strategies in ‘Course Introduction to Students of English 5, 6 or 7’ and ‘Follow up and Evaluating’ help to create, maintain and develop the community for each group of students and their teacher, who are all a part of the same community during the English lessons (when working in accordance with the socio-cultural learning theory).
When working in accordance with the socio-cultural learning theory, the feeling of the teacher and students working together towards a common goal (in accordance with the National Curriculum) at the end of the course has so far lead to a positive classroom climate. The students and the teacher are all responsible for doing their part of the job in order to reach their common goal. The teacher tries to bring exercises and learning tasks that engage the students and help them learn new skills or help them develop skills they already have. In the socio-cultural learning theory this can be described as exercises and tasks that give the students opportunities to acquire tools and practices and/or improve in using these.

To work with the learning tasks and exercises in accordance with the socio-cultural learning theory (as described in Appendix 1 of this essay) also makes it more possible to adapt the tasks and exercises in order to let every student develop their skills in accordance with what they need, so that it will not be too easy or too hard. Another advantage with teaching in accordance with the socio-cultural learning theory (as in the examples given in Appendix 1 of this essay) is that the students are often asked to share their own ideas, opinions and/or feelings in the learning tasks and exercises, but also about the learning tasks and exercises. What they think and do is considered important in order to reach the common goal for the community. The fact that students are often allowed to (within certain limitations of the exercises/learning tasks) make their own choices of what text/book they want to read and work with and how they want to hold their presentation etc. can also make the students feel engaged, listened to and responsible to do a good job, because their opinions are included as a part of the exercise.

My experiences from teaching in this way are mainly positive. There have hardly ever been any loud complaints from the students (even though English cannot be everybody’s favorite subject). Some students have also told me that they felt they learned a lot by working in this way. Most students have managed to develop their language skills in accordance with what is stated in the National Curriculum and they have completed the course with a passing grade. For students who have had a hard time learning English the atmosphere of the teacher and the students working together makes it easier and not so formal to discuss how to work and what to practice. It also makes it easier to discuss if the student feels he/she needs more time and help, like extra lessons with the special needs teacher.

Results from previous empirical studies, the discussion of examples of how to teach English literature, and the presentation of advantages and disadvantages of the socio-cultural learning theory vs the transmission theory, provide support for the first part of the hypothesis.
of this essay. This part of the hypothesis claims that: Teaching English literature in high school classes, in accordance with the socio-cultural learning theory, promotes lifelong language learning substantially better than teaching authentic English literature in accordance with the transmission theory.

Results from the theoretical study of the Swedish National Curriculum, for high school courses English 5, 6 and 7, and the discussion (in section 3 of this essay), of examples of how to teach English literature, provide support for the second part of the hypothesis: Teaching in accordance with the socio-cultural learning theory fulfills more stipulations in the National Curriculum in Sweden (for high school courses English 5, 6 and 7) in comparison with the transmission theory.
Works Cited


*Skolverket*: http://www.skolverket.se/polopoly_fs/1.174543!/Menu/article/attachment/English%20120912.pdf


Appendix 1: Examples and Experiences from Teaching English Literature in Accordance with the Socio-Cultural Learning Theory

The following subsections give a presentation of some learning tasks and exercises (which include the use of literary texts in English) I have found to work very well in my classes. These examples of teaching mainly follow the socio-cultural learning theory, but are also discussed in accordance with the transmission theory in the section of discussion in this essay.

Course Introduction to Students of English 5, 6 or 7

The first lesson when students start a new course is always devoted to give them information about what is stated in the National Curriculum for the course they are about to begin, so that they know what is expected of them in order achieve a passing grade at the end of the course. Then the students get a brief presentation of the teacher’s plan of how the students will work with English as a subject in order to cover what is expected in accordance with the National Curriculum. The students are encouraged to always interrupt the teacher’s presentation if they have questions or comments.

If it is the first time the teacher and the class meet the second lesson is devoted to sorting out everybody’s responsibilities when participating in the course. The students work in smaller groups of 3-4 students. They are given the task to discuss and write down what they consider to be the teacher’s responsibilities and each student’s responsibilities in order to get a good class room climate and to get through all that needs to be done in order to finish the course they are attending. After 10-15 minutes the students in each group present what they have written to the rest of the class and the teacher. Then there is a short discussion with the whole group and the teacher writes down the “list of responsibilities” created by the class. The teacher might also add some responsibilities to the list, but will never delete any responsibilities written by the students without discussing them with the class. The students are also asked to write down what they think of the subject English: Is it hard/easy, fun/boring? What do they think are their own strengths and what do they feel they need and/or want to practice? This gives a good opportunity for the teacher to find out what the students expect of their teacher and the class they attend. It is also a good opportunity for the teacher to make clear what is expected of the students but also to let the students know what they can expect from the teacher. The students are encouraged to always do their best when in class and when handing in exercises/tasks so that the teacher has the possibility to see what skills
each student already has obtained in accordance with the curriculum, but also what they need to practice even more in order to develop their skills in English.

**Follow up and Evaluating**

By the end of the term the students are asked to evaluate their own learning of English and are asked to answer the following questions by writing:

What do you think works well for you in the English course?

What do you think does not work so well for you in the English course?

What do you yourself think you need more practice of in the English course?

The students are also asked to read the curriculum for the course they are studying at the moment and then decide which grade they think they would get based on their knowledge and skills of English so far.

When the students have handed in their evaluations the teacher fills in the results of all of the assignments so far in the course. The teacher also writes which grade on the course (on a scale of A-F) the student would receive if this meeting would be the end of the course. The teacher then holds a short meeting with each of the students to look through and discuss the student’s evaluation and results. Most of the students show good judgement of their own knowledge and skills of English when it comes to this evaluation. This also gives an opportunity for each student and the teacher to discuss what the student can practice to develop his/her knowledge and skills of English even more. It is also an opportunity for the teacher to find out what the students think about the course. Is it too tough, too easy? What do the students wish to focus on in order to develop their knowledge and skills of English in accordance with the curriculum? Which activities, exercises and learning tasks might be useful to bring to class in order to give the students more opportunities to keep on developing their skills in English language?

**Drama Exercise**

This exercise takes the form of a short and mostly improvised role play. It is used mainly as an informal way of practicing speaking but is also a warm up for future possible drama exercises based on written authentic English literature. The exercise gives the teacher a hint about if the students seem to enjoy working in this way, which is useful information for the teacher when planning how to work with the class.
The first lesson when students are going to start working with this exercise they come to class unaware of what they are going to do. The teacher has prepared by bringing small blank notes in different colors (one color/group that will work with this exercise, 4-5 students/group is optional). When entering the classroom students are told to take one of the notes and then write down the name of a famous person on it. When everyone has done this the teacher tells the students to form groups based on the color of the note they have. When the students sit in their group the teacher reveals that the class will work with drama: Each group will come up with a short role play (maybe about 2 minutes long) which they will perform for the rest of the class and each student is supposed to play the famous person he/she has written on the note. Each group is then given photos of where the role play is to take place (in some English speaking country) and some authentic material from an English speaking country (such as coins, movie theatre ticket, tourist brochure) to include in their role play. Each group is also given a problem (such as a flat tire, they run out of gas, they have forgotten something) which is to occur in their role play and they also have to come up with a solution to the problem. The students are encouraged by the teacher to take the opportunity to speak as much English as possible, but students who find it too uncomfortable to speak English in front of their class is not forced to do so. They are still to participate in the exercise in some way, but can choose to have a role where they say only one word (for example ‘Yes’, ‘Hello’) if they want to. If they still find it too uncomfortable they may choose a role in which they say nothing. The rest of the lesson and usually the next lesson, each group gets to work with creating their own role play and practice it. Lesson three it is usually show time!

Working with Lyrics – an Introduction to Analyzing Literary Texts

Before starting this exercise students are asked to bring the lyrics of any song they want to work with (as long as the lyrics are written in English). To introduce this exercise the teacher then gives an example of how the students will get work with the lyrics of their choice. The teacher displays the lyrics of a song on an over-head/or by a big screen power point presentation and the students are then asked to read through the lyrics and after this read along while they get to listen to the song. The teacher then asks the students what they think the lyrics are about and what words/phrases can lead to that interpretation. Are there any symbols in the text? (Here the teacher also has a discussion with the students about what a symbol can be.) It is important to have a discussion about the fact that there are no definite right or wrong answers to an interpretation; instead it is important to give references from the text that is
being interpreted in order to support and explain an interpretation. The teacher also shows and discusses an example of his/her own interpretation in an assignment written by him/her.

With this exercise the students get to practice translation (English to Swedish) just to make sure they get the meaning of the words in the lyrics. They also get an opportunity to practice how to analyze/interpret an authentic text (What do they think the lyrics of their choice are about? What in the lyrics make them think this; words/phrases/symbols?). The exercise also includes listening to the lyrics as they are performed (in order to include this as a part of their interpretation). The students then get to write a short essay to present their personal analysis/interpretation of the lyrics. When writing this essay they should also include references to the lyrics they have interpreted. The final part of this task is an oral presentation of their own interpretation. Here each student has the choice of giving his/her presentation in front of the whole class, give the presentation with the teacher and one or two classmates as listeners (and then listen to the one or two classmates’ presentations as well) or with the teacher as the only one listening. After the oral presentation students hand in their written essay to the teacher.

Reading Literature, more than just Reading

One of the aims with this task is to let the students practice reading literary texts in English, preferably a novel. Students may choose any English novel they want to read (or if, for some reason, it is difficult for a student to read long texts it is also possible to choose novels adapted to ‘Easy Readers’ or a short story). The other aim with this task is to let the students practice how to focus on their own reading experience and express their own feelings, opinions and thoughts about the novel/short story, rather than focusing only on the story of the novel/short story. Usually the students get to read the first one or two lessons after they have chosen the books they want to read, just to get started, but the main part of this task is given as homework over a time of six weeks.

Before they students start reading the book of their own choice they are given some instructions about the whole task. The due date is set and the students are instructed to plan their reading so they will be able to hand in their final task when they are expected to. Furthermore the students are encouraged to not worry about each word they do not understand and instead focus on getting into the story. (If a word seems important in order to get the meaning of the story they should of course search for the meaning of that particular word.) The students are also encouraged to search for another book if they for some reason do not
like the book they have started on. But first they have to give the story a chance! If they choose to start reading another book they have to keep in mind that they still have the same due date for handing in their final task.

In the introduction of the task the students are also informed of what they are to focus on and write about both while they are reading and when they have finished reading the book. Besides writing the title and author of the book and writing a short summary of the plot, the students should also include the following:

Words to describe the book:

What was your first reaction to the story?

Was there anything you found confusing or difficult to understand? Try to explain what!

If you could be any character in the story, who would you be? Why?

Do you recognize or share any of the feelings of the characters in the story? Try to explain!

How does the story make you feel?

Do you like this story? Why/ Why not?
Appendix 2: The Pilot Study

A research, prior to writing this essay, was carried out through a small pilot study at a high school in Sweden. The aims of the pilot study were to investigate how teachers of English as a second language choose to work with English literature (such as novels, short stories, poems and dramas) and if they find that the use of authentic English literature can contribute to the students’ learning of the language. In the pilot study, three questions were sent by e-mail to teachers of English as a second language at a high school in Sweden. The e-mail included the following three questions:

“Do you think the use of English literature (such as novels, short stories, poems and dramas) can contribute to the student’s learning of English as a foreign language?”

“Do you use English literature (such as novels, short stories, poems and dramas) in your work as an English teacher?”

“How do you use English literature (such as novels, short stories, poems and dramas) in your teaching of English as a second language? Please describe and give some examples!”

These three questions were sent to nine teachers of English as a second language and six of them had the possibility to participate in the research for this essay. Since the research was carried out by asking teachers only at one of all high schools in Sweden the research is to be considered as a pilot study, meant to give some examples of teachers’ opinions and use of authentic English literature in their teaching of English as a second language. This pilot study also led to a deeper understanding of that almost any learning task or exercise can be adapted to be used in accordance with almost any learning theory.

All six teachers, who had the possibility to participate in the pilot study, agree that using English literary texts can contribute to the student’s learning of English as a foreign language. The following positive arguments for using English literature, when teaching English as a second language, were presented by the teachers:

- It is the best way to learn grammar and extend the students’ vocabularies.

- It helps the students develop all their language skills (speaking, listening, reading and writing) while they are working with authentic literature.

- It gives the students the possibility to experience different varieties of the English language within a real context.
- It gives the possibilities to learn about the culture, living conditions and mentalities of different eras (time periods) in countries where English is used as a native language.

- The stories in the literature are good to use for discussion. It gives the students and the teachers a possibility to place themselves in the characters’ situations and discuss matters from the characters’ points of view as well as the students’ and teachers’ own opinions.

One of the teachers also points out that it is important to think of the students’ interests and the level of their language proficiency when authentic English literature is used in the class room.

All of the participating teachers in the pilot study have answered that they use literary texts when they are teaching English as a second language. There are differences in how the teachers choose to work with English literature and also to what extent they use it as a part of their teaching. Each of the following examples, of tasks and exercises, is given by at least one of the teachers who participated in the pilot study:

- The students read novels/short stories and/or extracts from literary works (which are presented in the text-books used for teaching).

- The students practice how to take notes while reading and how to use quotations to support a statement they give.

- At least once in every English course the students are given the learning task to read a complete novel of their own choice. Students are often allowed to choose the novel they will read because it is important that they can find it interesting. If students for some reason find it too difficult to read an authentic novel, there are also adapted ‘easy readers’ to choose from.

- Sometimes the whole story of a novel is presented to the students by watching a movie. Sometimes the students read the beginning of a novel while the end is given to them through a movie, or the other way around (the students watch the beginning of a novel and are given the assignment to read the end).

- Students are given the task to read and then write a book review (which includes not only the plot, but also other aspects such as the main theme, writing techniques, narrative perspectives, settings, quotations, personal response etc). Sometimes the students give an oral book review instead.
- Instead of writing a book review the students have an essay-test of the book they have been assigned to read. The students are given many different topics to choose from. They may bring the novel they have read and may use dictionaries. The students get a few lessons to write the essay and the writing must be done during the English lessons.

- Authentic literature is used for different tasks/exercises of discussion. Sometimes the discussion is held within whole class and sometimes in pairs or smaller groups.

- For about 10 lessons the students work with a ‘book club’ in which the whole class is divided into smaller groups. The students may read the same novel or different ones. In each group the students discuss their books at the book club meetings during the lessons. The teacher gives the students different tasks/exercises for each meeting. All students have to be the ‘group leader’ in their group for at least one meeting. During a meeting the leader takes notes of what is being discussed and makes sure everybody in the group is aware of the task they need to do for the next meeting.

- The students read a book or watch a movie. This is followed by a seminar (half the class/seminar) where students present different aspects of the movie/book to each other.

- The students read poems and then try to write a poem on their own or in pairs.

- Working with literary history and drama, comparing new vs. old English language, analyzing the characters, elements and dramaturgy of a play.