

CHANGING PERSPECTIVES ON SELF AND OTHERS IN THE LITERATURE CLASSROOM

SIG Research on Literature Education symposium invited by Marloes Schrijvers, Tanja Janssen (the Netherlands) & Irene Pieper (Germany)

DISCUSSANT: Irene Pieper

About the theme

Researchers and philosophers alike suggest that reading literature may change us for the better. It may have moral benefits (Hakemulder, 2000; Nussbaum, 1990), enhance and deepen our sense of self (Sikora, Kuiken, & Miall, 2011), make us think about who we would (not) want to become in the future (Richardson & Eccles, 2007), foster our empathy (Bal & Veltkamp, 2013), and reduce prejudices toward others (Johnson, 2013).

While in educational settings the areas of philosophy and citizenship education may traditionally attend to these topics, literature teaching may do so as well. Reader response theorists (e.g., Rosenblatt, 1978) have argued that during literary reading, readers may vividly experience what happens to characters, imagining their thoughts and emotions in a particular situation. This 'simulation of social experience' (Mar & Oatley, 2008) may result in enhanced understandings of both ourselves and others.

Despite a large body of research on reader response practices and the literature classroom as an authentic social space, relatively little attention has been paid to what students take away from literary reading for their lives beyond the book and beyond the classroom.

Current pressing questions concern how reader response instruction and other pedagogical approaches may connect 'literary objectives' (e.g., interpretative skills, literary competence, literary-historical knowledge) to personally and socially oriented objectives, in particular in a time when testing and assessment may partly determine the curricula in language arts classrooms (Applebee & Langer, 2011).

Contributors & abstracts

Talking about Literature and Life: Effects of Dialogic Literary Instruction on Students' Personal and Social Insights

Marloes Schrijvers (University of Amsterdam), Tanja Janssen (University of Amsterdam), Olivia Fialho (Utrecht University) and Gert Rijlaarsdam (University of Amsterdam / University of Antwerp)

Studies have indicated that adolescents may gain personal and social insights from reading literary texts in the literature classroom. While research suggests that dialogic literature teaching may facilitate this kind of learning, empirical evidence for this claim is scarce. Our aim was therefore to assess the effects of a dialogic learning intervention in the literature classroom on Dutch upper secondary school students' personal and social insights. The intervention was designed collaboratively with teachers and was based on both an empirical multi-phase model of transformative reading experiences and a model of educational design principles, based on the research literature.

The intervention consists of four units, centering around literary short stories involving moral or social themes. In each unit, a pre-reading task and a reading instruction asks students to attend to previous experiences and/or affective responses triggered by the story or its theme. After reading, they exchange reading experiences in small-group, product-oriented dialogues. Each group presents the outcomes of the dialogue (e.g., a diagram, a moodboard, an advice to the main character) in class. Students then reflect on whether their ideas about themselves and the social or moral issue have changed.

In March 2017, twelve 10th grade classes ($N \approx 300$ students, 15-16 years old) will participate in the study. A switching replications design and mixed-models data-analysis will be applied. A questionnaire and qualitative tasks on transformative reading experiences that impact personal and social insights, as well as implementation fidelity measures, are currently being developed. Results and implications will be presented at the conference.

Place-based Literary Interpretation: Putting Yourself in Someone Else's Place with Place and Literature

Pernille Damm Mønsted Pjedsted (University of Aarhus & University Collage Lillebælt)

What happens with student's experiences with and understanding of literary interpretation if the places of relevance to the main character are involved in the reading and interpretation process? This paper will outline a new didactic and pedagogical approach for the literature classroom. Place-based literary interpretation (PLI) fosters learning about identity, self and others by involving places of relevance to the protagonist in the students' reading and interpretation processes. The PLI approach is based on a curriculum, or a didactic design, which was preliminarily tested by a teacher and students (age 14) in one eighth grade class for a period of 8 weeks in Danish secondary school. The didactic design

includes reading and interpretation of three young adult fiction books about identity and involves the students' experiences in a forest, prison, auto repair shop, and stadium.

The data used for this paper is based on a thematic analysis involving three semantic themes (Braun and Clarke, 2008). Two of the themes demonstrate that the PLI approach in the literature classroom enhances high student involvement and participation, as well as an empathetic analysis of the books whereby the students put themselves in the protagonist's place in the interpretation process.

The paper draws primarily on research based on experiential education (Roberts, 2012), theory of place (Casey, 2010 & Cresswell, 2015), and theory including perspectives on narratives (Bruner, 2006). In addition the paper will consider Gadamer's theory of Bildung which emphasizes that when we return from the other, we develop ourselves (Gadamer, 2004) – in this context the alienation process through place and literature.

Self-Insight, Social Insight and Moral Development through Literature: Three Approaches

Yael Poyas (Oranim College of Education) and Ilana Elkad-Lehman (Levinsky College of Education)

According research, encounters with literature contribute to students' social, moral and self-understanding. The official curriculum in Israel gives Literature a unique status and it is taught separately from other language-related subjects, due to its perception as a powerful tool for cultural, moral and social education.

However, the literary encounter may stem from different theoretical grounds, following which the educational intervention will be different as well. (1) The therapeutic encounter based on the work of Winnicott (1971), viewing the literary encounter as an in-between safe space allowing for self-searching and emotional experiences; (2) the moral encounter based on Buber's premise of existence as encounter (1937) and the hermeneutic theory of Levinas (1972), in which the interpretive process pursues a sense of moral responsibility towards the 'other'; (3) the ethical-critical encounter based on critical pedagogy principles (Giroux & McLaren, 1992), placing the power relations in the literary text and its different contexts at the heart of the interpretive process, in an effort to foster awareness of social justice and equality issues.

Recorded and written products from seven encounters of teachers from different cultures, religions and languages in Israel with literary texts, given no directions towards a particular

interpretive approach, were analyzed using a phenomenological approach. The analysis demonstrated that the readers mostly tended to use the therapeutic approach, searching for the self through encounters with the text. The ethical-critical approach was very rare, and its few appearances were met with silencing responses. We did find evidence of attempts to have a moral encounter which includes a feeling of responsibility to the 'other', but mostly when looking inside the reader's national group, not the confronting one.

The research findings have implications concerning the nature of classroom interventions and language teachers' education. These will be discussed in our presentation.