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DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.5617/adno.6227>

“Reading for pleasure, reading for understanding: Reading and metacognition in the English language classroom”

Background

This special volume of *Acta Didactica Norge* originated in a reading conference held on March 7-8, 2017 at Østfold University College, Halden. The conference was entitled “Everybody loves a good story: Reading for pleasure, reading for understanding”, and our aim was to bring together teachers and researchers at primary, middle and secondary schools as well as those involved in the training of teachers. The focus was on reading in English as a Second Language and the development of metacognitive skills for enhancing children’s and students’ knowledge and understanding of the reading process.

Potential speakers were asked to send in abstracts for suggested papers. The topics could include but were not limited to:

- Reading in the language classroom
- Reading children’s literature
- Teaching reading skills
- The reading process and teaching teacher training students
- Reading and language learning
- Innovative methods for teaching reading
- Evaluation of reading skills

Speakers were asked to include a metacognitive element in their papers, i.e. how do children/ students understand the reading process? How do they develop strategies for understanding texts, and how can they hone these? How do we

teach strategies for reading texts in English, and how effective are our methods? All speakers and participants (including those who did not give a paper) were invited to submit articles for publication in this special volume of *Acta Didactica Norge*, with a deadline in December 2017.

The majority of the conference speakers and participants were researchers and teachers working with ESL in teacher education at Norwegian, Swedish and British institutions of higher education. A number of bachelor students attended the conference and helped to introduce speakers and chair question and answer sessions. Colleagues within pedagogics and language didactics, several staff members from the Norwegian National Centre for Foreign Languages in Education (located at Østfold University College), and a representative from the Ministry of Education also attended the conference. Unfortunately, only a few practicing teachers in primary and secondary school were, understandably, able to participate, due to teaching commitments.

Many submissions were received from conference participants and speakers. In addition, several researchers who had not attended the conference saw the call for papers and submitted abstracts and articles for the special volume. After the selection and peer reviewing processes, we were left with twelve articles. Six of these focused on reading in connection with teacher education, whereas the remaining six discussed reading in primary and secondary education. This led to a natural division into two sections, “ESL Reading in teacher education” and “ESL Reading in primary and secondary school”. Two articles (Ingemannson and Sundmark) did not have a specific ESL context, but the findings reported are applicable to reading, metacognition and teaching literature in general and we therefore found them transferable to the ESL context and highly relevant for this volume.

Steering documents – reading and metacognition

The guest editors are both specialists within English literature and teach and supervise ESL pre-service teachers at the BA level and in-service teachers at the MA and PhD levels. The choice of reading and metacognition as the key subjects of the conference was due to the increased emphasis in Norwegian educational policy and steering documents on reading as a basic skill and the fact that teachers in all subjects are now considered to be reading teachers as well as subject-matter teachers. Furthermore, the most recent white paper on education (Norway NOU 2015:8) and the subsequent law proposal (Norway Meld. St. 28, 2015-2016) continue to focus on reading, while also emphasizing the importance of deep learning and metacognition. Here we briefly review some of these policy documents.

Reading is one of the five basic skills defined in the current national curriculum – *Kunnskapsløftet*, or LK06 (2006, *The Knowledge Promotion*) in

Norway. Reading plays a similar role in the Swedish national curriculum (Sweden 2017). In the *Framework for Basic Skills* (Norway, 2013), the Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training identified reading, writing, speaking, numeracy and digital skills as basic skills in education and elaborated on how they were to be integrated throughout the school curriculum and in all subjects. Teachers at all levels have focused on developing these skills with their students, as they are understood to be the foundation of life-long learning, and necessary for the individual's success in working life.

In 2015, a policy document on education was published. This document, the white paper *Fremtidens skole – Fornyelse av fag og kompetanse* [Norway NOU 2015:8, The school of the future – Renewal of subjects and competence, our trans.], was based on a report developed by a committee led by Professor Sten Ludvigsen. It contains different suggestions, aspirations and arguments about how the school of the future should be organized and what it should comprise. The committee recommended that the focus on basic skills be continued in the on-going development of the new national- and subject-curricula. However, the committee also pointed to the need to focus more on the learning process itself, and emphasized critical thinking and deep learning as extensions of the basic skills. After several hearings, the report was developed into Stortingsmelding 28 (2015-2016) as *Fag – Fordypning – Forståelse – En fornyelse av Kunnskapsløftet* [Subjects – in-depth study – understanding – A renewal of the Knowledge Promotion, our trans.]

In section 4.3.5 of the parliamentary proposal, the committee draws on the concept of metacognition:

Metakognisjon er et sentralt begrep innenfor læringsforskningen som betyr å reflektere over egen tenkning og læring. I skolen handler metakognisjon om at elevene lærer å bruke refleksjon aktivt i det faglige arbeidet. Metakognisjon omfatter mer enn å mestre strategier for å tilegne seg lærestoffet. Det inkluderer evne til å gjøre kritiske vurderinger og velge egnede strategier for å løse et problem i ulike fag. Hvilke læringsstrategier som er relevant å lære, avhenger av innholdet i det enkelte fag. Betydningen av metakognisjon og å lære å lære omtales i flere lands læreplaner, blant annet i Finland og Singapore.

[Metacognition is a central concept within learning research. This means reflecting on one's own thinking and learning. In school, metacognition means that pupils learn to use reflection actively in their work with the different subjects. Metacognition denotes more than simply learning different strategies for understanding teaching materials. It also includes the ability to carry out critical evaluations and to choose appropriate strategies for solving problems in different subjects. Which learning strategies are relevant in teaching, depends on the content of the particular subject. The importance of metacognition and *learning to learn* is discussed in the national curricula of a number of countries, e.g. Finland and Singapore, among others. Our trans.]

The report emphasizes that metacognition and learning strategies are important for pupils to develop; they will be needed both in school and later in life. They

point out that metacognition is an overarching competence in all subjects, and like Flavell (1985), they define metacognition as consisting of two parts: learning to learn and monitoring one's own learning. The proposal explains that "Metacognisjon og selvregulert læring omtales i dagens læreplanverk som læringsstrategier og motivasjon for læring" (Norway 2015-2016, section 4.3.6 [Metacognition and self-regulated learning are discussed in today's curricula as learning strategies and motivation for learning. Our trans.]).

As the core elements of each subject in the new curriculum are being formed and discussed, it has come to our attention that the importance of literature in ESL teaching has been downplayed. Instead, it is becoming an afterthought or appendage to cultural studies. This trend is particularly worrisome in relation to reading and metacognition. What are pupils and students in fact expected to read and why? Should they still be taught reading strategies appropriate with literature as well as those that can be used with expository texts? The extra focus on reading in the national curriculum since 2000 has emphasized the importance of not only developing reading strategies in our pupils, but also "the joy of reading". Literary texts help pupils to go beyond instrumental approaches such as skimming and scanning and go deeper into the message of the text. This incorporates aspects of social learning as well as personal enrichment.

As our volume shows, literature is one of the most important forms of text in the classroom: it is both "the guide to moral conduct, and . . . the warrant of cultural authenticity" (Kramsch & Kramsch, 2000, 509). The special nature of literary texts – the fact that literature is a genre in its own right – its very literariness, "has remained largely invisible up to now" (ibid., 570). In the USA, the shrinking importance of literature in ESL and language teaching, from as early as 1977 (Rudolph), throughout the 20th century and into our own century has been documented and problematized in Kramsch and Kramsch (ibid.). This unfortunately seems to be an international trend. The authors warn that educational programmes stand in danger of losing the crucial poetic dimension of literature that is so important for language learners and teachers. In this volume we try to highlight the dangers of the current situation, which underestimates the importance of reading pleasure and personal enrichment. This is a serious, potential shortcoming of the new curriculum soon to be implemented.

While studies reveal that focused and extended use of metacognitive strategies result in deeper and more advanced reading practices (Sheorey & Mokharti, 2002), and that teaching metacognitive strategies explicitly is a "key for success" (Iwai, 2011, 157), many of the contributors here discuss approaches to literary texts that are not used as mere comprehension exercises, but rather focus on the literary characteristics of the texts and the deeper learning that may be extracted from literature.

Presentation of articles

ESL Reading in teacher education

In “Reading and the profession: On the literary education of English school teachers”, Katherina Dodou addresses the question of how English departments best can teach literature and literary reading to future upper-secondary school teachers of English. Her article “combines metacognitive analyses of disciplinary ways of thinking with profession theory to reflect on the literary content knowledge upper-secondary school teachers need for their teaching practice”. Dodou advocates that we change our academic teaching practices, and proposes “that literary debates over reading also be incorporated and that the principles and procedures underpinning professional modes of reading literature be explicitly articulated”.

In “Understanding the psychological reading process: Preparing pre-service ESL teachers to become reading teachers”, Karen Patrick Knutsen focuses on how we can use “narrative transportation” theory to help pre-service teachers understand the psychological dimensions of the reading process. This can help them to become better reading teachers and facilitate deep learning through literature. She exemplifies narrative transportation theory using Julia Bertagna’s young adult *Exodus Trilogy* in the science-fiction genre, tying it to the overarching theme of environmental sustainability in the Norwegian core curriculum.

In “Comparing first and second language reading: the use of metacognitive strategies among Norwegian university students”, Nicole L. Busby presents a study investigating Norwegian university students’ metacognitive awareness of their own reading strategies both in their native language and in English. A total of 316 students answered a questionnaire that surveyed the students’ use of reading strategies and their self assessment of their proficiency in both languages. Although the students had similar approaches to reading in both L1 and L2, they assessed their reading proficiency in L1 as superior. There was nonetheless a surprising similarity in the awareness of reading strategies in L1 and L2. When reading L2 texts, however, students used two reading strategies more often: reading more slowly and using resources such as dictionaries.

Annelise Brox Larsen, in “An intertextual approach to reading literary texts in English in teacher education”, focuses on intertextuality and its contribution to reading skills for ESL/EFL student teachers. The article comprises a single case study of a teacher/researcher’s observation log and field notes on a teaching project with a group of teacher trainees in English. The students identified intertextual traits in *When Jays Fly to Bárðmo*, by Balderson (1968). Brox Larsen argues that the identification of intertextual references assists students and serves as scaffolding in the reading process. Knowledge of how intertextuality works can facilitate the development of metacognitive strategies of reading.

In the following essay, “Challenges and possibilities in educating EFL reading teachers”, Juliet Munden is interested in how we can educate competent EFL reading teachers. She investigates the under-researched profession of the teacher educator, the criticism that student teachers do not read sufficiently, the role of national tests in shaping how reading in English is taught in school, and the challenge of making sense of the reading strategies concept. With the aid of Elizabeth Bowen’s “The Demon Lover”, Munden presents a sequence of pre-, during- and post-reading activities and combines these with reflective exercises to be led by the teacher educator. This is designed to heighten awareness of the importance of planning and teaching coherent and motivating learning sequences, which increase reading motivation and proficiency in the English classroom.

Jane M. Ekstam focuses on teacher training programs in English and the use of literature, specifically when combined with reader-response theory. In “Metacognition and Reader Response: the use of reading logs in the envisionment-based classroom” she examines students’ reading-log comments, which she categorises according to Judith Langer’s (1995) five stances (levels) of reading. Most students, as expected, stayed within the lower stances 1–3. Several, however, made comments corresponding to stances 4 and 5, indicating deeper reading and a higher level of self-reflection. Ekstam demonstrates that reading logs can give important indications of how deeply students read. This is important for teachers and students alike.

ESL Reading in primary and secondary school

In “Djup läsning och lässtrategier” [Close reading and reading strategies], Mary Ingemannson focuses on the reading practices of 9-13 year-olds and discusses how children can improve their ability to close read texts. Her study adapts and develops Judith Langer’s (1995) concept of envisionment building and incorporates the use of authentic, stance-based questions. To ensure that the content is properly discussed, text talks with teachers and other pupils should be carried out. Re-reading is important; the text talks result in a closer reading of the text. Motivation is increased by the social interaction that is part of text interpretation. It is also increased by the feedback students receive from one another as well as from their teacher. Ingemannson demonstrates that close reading, combined with stance-based questions, is a highly effective reading strategy, which enables the students to understand not only the text, but also the reading process.

In the next essay, “ESL reading in primary and secondary school”, Anna Birketveit, Hege Emma Rimmereide, Monika Bader and Linda Fisher argue that extensive reading in the second language should be practised in primary school. They carried out a study on extensive reading using questionnaires in three primary schools in Norway to ascertain: what types of reading materials appealed to the pupils; the role of gender in their evaluation of the books; how

the academic level of the pupils affects their reading preferences; and the pupils' attitudes toward extensive reading in English. The study demonstrates that there was a significant difference between the schools in terms of evaluating the reading material. There were also significant gender differences in reading preferences. The study also showed that the learners appreciated this rare chance to select their own reading materials.

Ion Drew's essay "Reading in the second language classroom: consideration of first language approaches in second language contexts", reviews research on how three L1 approaches for promoting reading and other literacy skills have been applied to L2 classrooms in Norway. The three approaches are the Early Years Reading Programme, Reading and Writing Workshops, and Readers Theatre. The essay highlights the special needs of L2 readers, which are different to the needs of those who are reading in their first language. Drew argues that L2 readers would benefit from a varied approach incorporating implicit and explicit teaching and learning. The essay addresses the advantages and challenges in implementing the three approaches. Of the three methods, Readers Theatre is, according to Drew, the easiest to apply to an L2 context.

Research suggests that successful reading requires the interaction of several different cognitive skills and strategies in order to ensure comprehension of texts (Baker, 2002). Such skills and strategies are controlled by a global process called metacognition (Kuhn & Dean, 2004). In "Raising metalinguistic awareness in a classroom to promote reading comprehension: Examples from Roald Dahl's novel *The BFG*", Beck Sinar argues that a major part of metacognition when reading includes a metalinguistic component. It is thus necessary to devote time to raising metalinguistic awareness when teaching reading skills. Beck focuses on a short extract from Dahl's children's novel to elucidate how metalinguistic awareness can be raised in the classroom. Additional benefits of this method include enhancing and supporting metacognitive tools, improving vocabulary acquisition and development, and encouraging a love of language in the classroom.

In "The visual, the verbal and the very young: A metacognitive approach to picture books", Björn Sundmark discusses the development in the use of pictures and illustrations from early concept books to narrative picture books for children and young teenagers. The article presents current research findings and gives an overview of different kinds of picture books and how these build literary and metacognitive competence. Sundmark argues that picture books are crucial in this process. The metacognitive benefits of picture books, including both the verbal and visual dimensions of the text, are analyzed with the aid of picture book and comic book theory. Sundmark highlights the characteristic features of early concept books, verb-oriented concept books, and narrative picture books. In addition, he explores the potential of the latter for advanced story telling in terms of symbolism, irony, and character development.

In “Å lese film” [Reading films], Britt W. Svenhard takes a closer look at the learning potential inherent in fictional films in the English classroom. The essay discusses how teachers’ assumptions about the positive effects of films on language learning and acquisition of knowledge can be further developed through the use of learning strategies taken from the arts, including visual learning strategies and traditional genre teaching. Svenhard also shows how the integration of films in the English subject can strengthen pupils’ metacognitive competence by providing scaffolding for their reading processes. This in turn can stimulate critical thinking and independent learning.

Description of selection procedure

As Brevik and Fosse point out, the rate of acceptance for special volumes is normally somewhat higher than for articles submitted for publication in regular volumes (2016, p. 8). This is because there is a preliminary sorting process where contributors are asked to send in an abstract. On this basis they are normally invited to send in an article for evaluation by the guest editors of the special volume and the regular editors of the journal. The contributors received feedback on their papers and were invited to resubmit and go through the formal peer reviewing process. All articles were allocated to two reviewers (double-blind reviewing). Essays were revised after the peer review process and then subjected to a third review by the co-editors, when they were, if necessary, revised again.

Acknowledgement of peer reviewers

We would like to acknowledge and thank all the anonymous peer reviewers who have so generously taken the time to assist us and our contributors through the various reviews. This is an essential part of securing the scientific quality of the journal articles. As established, each of the articles has been reviewed and commented on by at least two peer reviewers (double blind) and by the two editors of this special issue. In some cases, the responsible editor and section editor for *Acta Didactica Norge* have also contributed to the reviewing process. Reviewers have been selected from a number of different teaching institutions in Norway, Sweden, and Spain. Many of our contributors have expressed indebtedness to the reviewers, who have put so much work into the articles, giving the authors an opportunity to improve the quality of their essays.

As guest editors, we would also like to express our special gratitude to Glenn Ole Hellekjær and Eva Thue Vold, who have patiently assisted us in the editing process and helped us to recruit a number of peer reviewers. And of course, a

volume like this would never have materialized without the expert help of Toril Eggen, our lay-out editor. Thank you all so much.

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