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Approaches to Critical Literacy Instruction in the Middle School ESL/EFL classroom

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Abstract:

The purpose of this literature review is to compare some critical reading comprehension classroom practices globally, with particular focus on the teaching of reading comprehension in Sweden, where student well being and equity are issues of importance. Critical literacy used is a term that encompasses many aspects of power related issues in language. The Swedish curriculum is explicit in naming these issues of student identity and democratic agency which it shares with critical pedagogical practices.

The result of the review is a presentation and discussion of the different studies, using a structure based on one used for critical discourse analysis instruction with students. The evidence suggests that higher level comprehension is a skill that takes time to train and should be done explicitly by pointing out the aspects of language which convey meaning. Learning to search the text for evidence of the underlying meaning gave very strong effect sizes on standardized tests for reading comprehension. The reading comprehension results of minority/ESL students on standardized tests improved when space was made to discuss very different experiences within the same culture in language classrooms.

Keywords: critical literacy, ESL/EFL classrooms, critical thinking, English teaching, middle school, questioning strategies

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1.Introduction

It was my students who lead me to this inquiry into reading comprehension. The situation that lead to this interest came up when a class of ninth graders in English class in Sweden finished a unit on themes around the civil rights movement in America. They had watched the film *American History X* and read a short story called *The Cheat* and *I Have a Dream* by Martin Luther King. They had used Venn diagrams and other strategies to see what the texts had in common and reflect on their own ideas about equality and justice. The students were then motivated to read a president's speech on immigration, and they used the same inquiry methods of asking themselves questions as they read, and the comprehension strategies of making connections between texts. This resulted in the discovery that the manuscript of the film and political speech shared much of the same racist rhetoric. We were prepared to talk about the individual arguments made, the meanings of words, and concepts that gave basic comprehension. But discussing world view behind texts and the historical context of modern media texts gives a basic understanding of power and is a necessary part of comprehension. Asking students to consider who the intended audience is for a text or why a person might talk this way would make the meaning different between two otherwise mostly identical texts.

Literacy today is a necessarily complicated endeavour. Reading comprehension enables us to work with questions about positioning and power when reading texts, to accomplish the task of empowering students to make decisions about their own identities, that is in their thinking, speaking and behaviour as responses to texts. Reading comprehension concepts are applicable, when we discuss and analyse various media that is the content for English instruction in Sweden such as such as films, songs, interviews and more (Skolverket 2011. p.34). My own experience as a student teacher with middle school students of English in Sweden has been that literacy education is needed to make sense of the wide variety of visual, oral and textual messages which influence them, in an open dialogue with students.

1.1.Aims and research questions

The aim of this literature inquiry is to consult recent research on critical literacy instruction in ESL/EFL classrooms for answers in how we can institute classroom practices that foster better language development in English as a Foreign or Second Language (ESL) and student well-being.

To accomplish this task, the following research question is proposed:

How is critical literacy practised in different EFL/ESL classrooms globally and what aspects are particularly relevant to the teaching of it in Sweden?

2. Background

2.1. Different levels of reading comprehension

Critical literacy in English classrooms in Sweden is an aspect of reading comprehension and is measured by standardized tests, such as the OECD International Program for Student Assessment (PISA). The PISA model of literacy is a taxonomy of understanding where literal meaning is subordinated to making inferences and using source criticism (Lundahl 2012, p. 248). According to the National Agency for Education in Sweden, there is no other country in the OECD with larger gaps between the reading comprehension scores for native students compared with those with foreign backgrounds, which is a source of concern (Skolverket, 2016)

For purposes of describing the pedagogical goals and assessment, reading comprehension is described in a taxonomy of learning that is sometimes evident and other times not clearly delineated (Lundahl 2012, p. 252). Investigations into the grammatical choices of a text is the beginning of the mediation of author's constructions, and the process of critical reflection. Critical literacies, according to the National Agency for Education, entail four aspects of reading comprehension. It is the ability to use language to understand the deeper meanings of texts, to explain and compare texts in different forms, not just as script, to develop a holistic view of language, knowledge, identity and democracy, and lastly to critically examine questions of class, gender, ethnicity and other power related issues (Skolverket, 2014). The National Agency for Education in Sweden recommends that critical literacy work is begun in Swedish language instruction in the early years of elementary school, as a collaborative exercise between teachers and students that increases motivation for the students and makes power relations in society visible (Skolverket, 2014).

Students of English in Sweden from grade 7-9, progress from the level of beginner to the level of *independent user* of the English language according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages. During the upper middle school years, the Swedish school curriculum is aligned with the Council of Europe's content recommendations for language learning (Skolverket, 2015). This means that the subject contents are relevant to students' daily lives in the early grades. By the teenage years, ethical discussions which take seriously the feelings, experiences and views of students are relevant subjects of language study (Skolverket 2011, p. 12). The position of the English language in Sweden is referred to as both a foreign language and a second language. A foreign language because English is not the native language of Scandinavian countries, but having importance in an expanding circle of global influence in academic studies, tourism, industry and research (Lundahl 2012, p. 83).

2.2 A student centered approach

The curriculum in Sweden values a concern for the well-being of students that should permeate all school activity;

The school should promote understanding of other people and the ability to empathise. Concern for the well-being and development of the individual should permeate all school activity. No one should be subjected to discrimination on the grounds of gender, ethnic affiliation, religion or other belief system, transgender identity or its expression, sexual orientation, age or functional impairment or other degrading treatment. Such tendencies should be actively combated. Xenophobia and intolerance must be confronted with knowledge, open discussion and active measures (Skolverket 2011, p.9).

The course plan for English in Sweden requires that teachers and students “reflect on living conditions, social issues and cultural phenomena in different contexts and parts of the world where English is used” (Skolverket, 2011). Knowing how to actively combat ideologies of xenophobia and intolerance embedded in texts can be a pedagogical challenge. Reading comprehension goes beyond explicit meanings of words and simple conclusions to personal meaning making in light of the rhetorical analysis of texts. This is a skill required for students to navigate media today and in line with the goals of the Swedish school curriculum to develop in students “a lifelong desire to learn” (Skolverket, 2011)

Bo Lundahl in the book, *Engelsk Språkdidaktik* (2012) lists several categories that can be used in discourse analysis with students in exploring text critically, they are In the text, Behind the text, and Context and intertext (Lundahl 2012, p. 265). Critical literacy arises from three sources, states Bo Lundhal, the text itself, the student's understanding of how the language is used and the student's knowledge of the world (Lundahl, 2012, p. 247). ESL students benefit from many opportunities to make these connections to prior knowledge for better comprehension (Hedge, 2000, p. 192). Bo Lundhal describes a progression from *basic comprehension* to *critical understanding* of the English language. This is accomplished by asking questions meant to raise student awareness of a different perspective (Lundahl, 2012, p. 468).

3.Theoretical perspective

Alastair Pennycook has written of the connection between critical applied linguistics and critical literacy, as critical literacy is the pedagogical use of critical applied linguistics (Pennycook 2004, p. 786). According to Alastair Pennycook, the central concern of analysis of social relations in English language teaching is a motivation that is shared with studies in critical applied linguistics, specifically critical discourse analysis (Pennycook 2004, p. 789). The definition of critical applied linguistic work in language education therefore is the focus on how social relations of class, race or gender play out in language (Pennycook 2004, p.796). This is especially relevant for teachers of English as a second language as a necessary part of a student-centered approach that relates language use to the students immediate experience of the world (2004, p. 790). Critical literacy as described by Pennycook therefore is useful for analysing approaches to teaching reading comprehension and literacy in the classroom. An important connection can be made between critical applied linguistics as a theory related to the Swedish curriculum's requirement that teachers actively combat discrimination, xenophobia and intolerance being “a view that insists not merely on the alleviation of pain, but also the possibility of change” (Pennycook 2004, p. 816-817).

Different orientations or motivations to teaching critical literacy have common pedagogical goals for students, that is the engagement of students in using language independently to think for themselves as they participate in society. Methods seek to encourage students' creativity, that is, to give students opportunities for discussing “social change, cultural diversity, economic equity, and political enfranchisement” (Pennycook 2004, p.786). Three orientations described by Pennycook are text-analytic, feminist and post-structuralist approaches, and Freirean-based critical pedagogy (Pennycook 2004, p. 786). Recognizing the sorts of assumptions about social hierarchy that are presumed by texts in schoolbooks or curricula are the domain of critical literacy and are meant to be considered throughout all aspects of language teaching (Pennycook, 2001, p.16).

A traditional approach to critical literacy is known as a text analytic approach. Teachers help students in achieving a critical analytical stance by pointing out key words, grammatical

choices and graphic elements from various sources in the target language. This aspect of critical literacy seeks to give students training in critical text analysis through explicit instruction in the choices of linguistic forms in discourse (Pennycook 2004, p. 787).

A second aspect of critical pedagogy, is the problematizing practice of considering language through the lens of “feminism, queer theory, postcolonialism” and other perspectives (Pennycook 2004, p. 785, 2001, p. 5). This is accomplished by making space for discussions of experiences that shape students' identities. Questioning societal norms and highlighting gender perspectives are part of this aspect of critical literacy. The goal is to make evident the power relations in interpersonal communications to create a more equitable society (Pennycook 2001, p. 16).

A third aspect of a critical pedagogical tradition in critical literacy is that inspired by Paulo Friere. It is defined by recognition of the agency of students and a rejection of the banking model of education, whereby students are vessels to be filled with quantities of knowledge. This pedagogical philosophy seeks to create in second language learners a *critical bilingualism* through open acknowledgement of how language is used as a vehicle to convey ideological concepts such as class-based inequality through stereotypes. Students receive explicit instruction in how multiple understandings can arise from the same text depending on the positions taken by the receivers and producers of communication (Pennycook 2001, p.103). This aspect of critical literacy is achieved through the explicit naming of these ideas in language learning. The goal is to empower students to employ their intellect to “name the world” that is, through critical understanding comes the power for change (Freire 1972, p. 178). In critical literacy language teaching, the issue of class becomes relevant for students who internalize feelings of marginality.

These three general categories represent different orientations to critical language teaching that can be used to think about how teachers motivate different classroom practices and scaffold the critical understanding of language. Therefore, this literature study is organised according to several aspects of discourse analysis. A strength of this method is that the questioning technique of looking in the text, behind the text, at context and inter text and lastly at social roles and power relations, can also consider Pennycook's orientations to critical literacy, that is, text-analytic approaches, problematising practice and Freirean pedagogy. A weakness with this structure is that a discussion of critical literacy studies with students is not a theory, but a pedagogical tool based upon a model for studies in applied discourse analysis.

4.Method and Materials

4.1.Database Searches

An information search for relevant articles was conducted in databases accessible through the online library services available through the University of Dalarna. First by formulating relevant search terms, then by limiting the search to make the data more manageable when necessary. Manual searches were also conducted to look for relevant articles by the same author, which is recommended search strategy in a literature review (Barajas, Forsberg & Wengström, 2013. p.78). An overview of the literature query method for this study which resulted in the texts chosen for this literature study follows with a more detailed review in the end of this study.

Search history – ERIC	Restrictions	No. of results
Critical Literacy in ESL classrooms	none	31,699
Critical Literacy in ESL classrooms	Peer Review, Full text	2,541
Critical Literacy in ESL classrooms in middle school	Peer Review, Full text	2,151
Critical Literacy and critical thinking in ESL classrooms in middle school	Peer Review, Full text	208
Six articles read/one used		Bobkina, J., & Stefanova, S. (2016). Literature and critical literacy pedagogy in the EFL classroom: Towards a model of teaching critical thinking skills. <i>Studies in Second Language Learning and Teaching</i> , 6(4), 677-696.

Search History – Summon Service	Restrictions	No. of results
Critical literacy in English education in Sweden	Peer review, full text, scientific articles	3,164
Critical literacy and critical thinking in English education in Sweden	Peer review, full text, scientific articles	1,591
Critical literacy and critical thinking in English education in Sweden in middle school	Peer review, full text, scientific articles	804
Articles reviewed 6 Articles used for this survey 1		Myers, J., & Eberfors, F. (2010). Globalizing English through intercultural critical literacy. <i>English education</i> , 42(2), 148-170.

Search History – Google scholar	Restrictions	No. of results
Critical Literacy in ESL classrooms	none	59,600
Critical Literacy in ESL classrooms	Since 2013	16,800
Critical Literacy in ESL classrooms in middle school	Since 2013	16,400
Critical Literacy and critical thinking in ESL classrooms in middle school	Since 2013	15,800
Critical Literacy and critical thinking in ESL classrooms in middle school teaching	Since 2013	15,700
Critical Literacy and critical thinking in ESL classrooms in middle school teaching	Since 2016	5,470
Critical Literacy and critical thinking in ESL classrooms in middle school teaching in Sweden	Since 2013	2,040
Critical Literacy and critical thinking in ESL classrooms in	Since 2016	616

middle school teaching in Sweden		
Meta-analysis of critical literacy	none	102
Number of articles reviewed 7 Number of articles used 1		Murphy, P. K., Wilkinson, I. A., Soter, A. O., Hennessey, M. N., & Alexander, J. F. (2009). Examining the effects of classroom discussion on students' comprehension of text: A meta-analysis.

Search History – Google scholar	Restrictions	No. of results
Critical Literacy and Hilary Janks	none	1620
Critical Literacy and Hilary Janks	Since 2013	2
Number of articles reviewed 2 Number of articles used 1		Janks, H. (2013). Critical literacy in teaching and research1. <i>Education Inquiry</i> , 4(2), 225-242.

Search History – Google Scholar	Restrictions	No. of results
Critical literacy in ESL classrooms	none	57,800
Critical literacy in ESL classrooms	Since 2013	16,800
critical literacy in ESL classrooms and critical thinking	Since 2013	16,700
critical literacy in ESL classrooms and critical thinking methodology	Since 2013	16,000 *Bobkina also listed here
critical literacy in ESL classrooms and critical thinking in English teaching in middle school	Since 2013	15,100
critical literacy in ESL classrooms and critical thinking in English teaching in middle school teaching questioning strategies	Since 2013	11,100
Number of articles reviewed 7 Number of articles used 1		Zhang, G. (2015). Learning Critical Literacy in ESL Classrooms. <i>Creative Education</i> , 6(12), 1316.

A search for sources was conducted via online databases using keywords from my research topic. Texts that were chosen for this study exemplify critical language analysis, that is, multiple understandings of a text due to the positioning of the creator or receiver of the communication, giving students time to discuss personal experiences that form their identity, questioning societal norms and highlighting gender perspectives, and lastly pointing out grammatical choices and even graphic elements.

The studies that were included were chosen because they offered answers to what sorts of approaches are taken in critical literacy instruction in different ESL/EFL classrooms globally. The studies vary in the choice of “texts” for critical analysis. For Hilary Janks (2013) who proposes a theory of critical literacy, one of the chosen objects of analysis is a controversial painting, also text messages of students in the former apartheid South Africa, and a school

curriculum in USA that offered a critical literacy approach to ethnic studies. For Jamie Myers and Fredrik Eberfors (2010) it is an online forum for students and student teachers in villages in Sweden, who discuss inter-cultural literacy by analysing short stories in English. Jelena Bobkina and Svetlana Stefanova (2016) present a program for reading English poetry in Spain with ESL students. ESL students in China are represented by Quangtian Zhang (2015, p.1317) where a text is defined as “any expression, written, spoken, drawn, painted or shown.” The study represented by P. Karen Murphy, Ian A. G. Wilkinson, Anna O. Soter, and Maeghan N. Hennessy (2009) is a meta-analysis that covers several decades of critical literacy classroom discussions from 42 different empirical studies' measurement of students high-level reading comprehension (Murphy, et al. 2009,p.745). These texts all offered concrete ideas for programs of studies and questioning strategies for ESL students in the classroom.

5.Results

In this section are the findings from the various authors in answering the aims of this study. The results are organized according to the four categories in Lundahl's questioning strategy, *behind the text, in the text, context and inter text* and *social roles and power relations*. These categories help to give an answer to the research question *How is critical literacy practiced in different EFL/ESL classrooms globally and what aspects are particularly relevant to the teaching of it in Sweden?*

5.1.Looking in the text

In this category the reader becomes aware of what key words there are in the text, that is what distinctive lexical choices have been made. What can one say about the semantic fields or if specialist vocabulary that has been used. The reader should consciously notice how the grammatical choices that have been made position the author and the receiver of the text. What are the function of sentences, how does modality or conditions apply to pacify or affect the reader. The same is true for the meanings of graphic elements such as pictures and typography (Lundahl, 2001,p.101).

5.1.1.Key words in the text

The authors in the studies seem to disagree about at what stage of reading comprehension begins the process of personal meaning making for students. In Bobkina and Stefanova's (2016, p.689-690) text, students engage in “pre-reading exercises” such as to choose from a random list of words which are likely to appear in a poem about fatherly advice, they are also asked to identify several adjectives and verbs used by the author. The participants in Myers and Eberfors (2010, p. 156) discuss according to their own questions about the text for study. Interpretations regarding how the language is used is discussed, as the goal for the forum is an inter cultural exchange. Janks' (2013, p. 234) Students consider which words reveal something about the speaker and the intended audience. The students' knowledge of their world is used to make inferences about a text. Zhang (2015, p. 1318) is concerned that there is potential for “concept and word choices” to operate in harmful ways, as an act of indoctrination. It is therefore important that teachers of critical literacy are themselves familiar with seven “contexts of texts.”

5.1.2.Grammatical choices that have been made

Grammatical elements are emphasized differently by the studies. In Bobkina and Stefanova's (2016, p. 690) analysis of the Kipling poem, there exists an opportunity to discuss how the grammatical choice of the “if, then” statement positions the reader of the poem. This is not done however, and the focus of the exercise is training in language proficiency. In contrast, consciously naming genre conventions that could position the reader is the goal with Myers

and Eberfors (2010, p. 165) where students were explicitly asked to contemplate the authors' use of cultural norms. For Janks (2013, p. 234) this raises another aspect of critical literacy, that grammatical choices in the description of a text speak to different groups in society, has larger political implications. Differences in discourse arise because of "values, traditions, class, education, or race." An interesting aspect brought up by Zhang (2015, p. 1318) is *ambiguity*. When the rhetoric that is used seems to not contain cultural, social or gender references, the reader should notice the absence of these.

5.1.3. Graphic elements (pictures, typography)

All of the studies in the literature review are positive to including visual and oral "texts" for studies in critical literacy, as it was a part of the selection process for the literature review. Bobkina and Stefanova's (2016, p. 686) lesson plan includes an opportunity to discuss the graphical elements of the poems use in architecture, because a quote from the poem studied is inscribed over the entrance to the central tennis court at Wimbledon. In Myers and Eberfors (2010, p. 158) text, a discussion is made regarding an author's symbolic use of pawns, to illustrate how the characters are trapped in actions that are not of their choosing. Analysis of graphical elements as text in language study is specifically named by Janks' text when analysing a painting. Zhang (2015, p.1317) gives a definition of texts as all socially created constructions that have personal meaning for some one, and that can be challenging to the traditional definition of texts in the classroom when "any expression, written, spoken, drawn, painted or shown" can become the subject for critical analysis.

5.2. Looking behind the text

In this category one investigates the world view, ideology, belief and value system lying behind the text. The reader questions whether or not there are any contradictory ideas or values behind or underlying the text. The reader should also reflect on the point of view, ideology, beliefs that one brings to the text (Lundahl, 2001, p.101).

5.2.1. World view, ideology, belief and value system

Every study in this review considered the world view articulated by a text as a social construct. Only Myers and Eberfors (2010, p. 155) turned to the study of students own communication, to see one's self as other being an important part of critical understanding of belief or value system. This illustrates the observation made by Zhang (2015, p.1319) who defines world view as "a series of master narratives, which can be objective or self-reflective." Other studies acknowledged that more or less hegemonic values in society are reflected in texts, and have the power to influence. For example, For Janks (2013, p. 234) world view and ideology are the essence of power in discourse. Students should learn to always ask oneself during discussions of art and culture, "whose identities are validated, whose values become hegemonic," because this validity has meaning ultimately for the rule of law in a society. Likewise, for Bobkina and Stefanova 2016, p. 687) the Kipling poems' morality is depicted as having had wide acceptance for British society, but the students are asked if the advice in the poem is applicable to today's world, thereby making it also a product of discourse.

5.2.2. Contradictory ideas or values behind the text

Contradictory ideas underlying a text were represented in the studies as opportunities for students to understand and practice argumentation skills in the target language and have a democratic function. This was done implicitly by Bobkina and Stefanova's (2016, p. 689) text, by juxtaposing quotes about maturity and youth. A conclusion is that students will ask the question "Can I be both young and mature?" This self reflective stance appears in Myers and Eberfors (2010, p. 156) in a forum discussion of why is it that people may get stuck in a position of doing something they do not want to do with their lives, students asked if this a

product of a cultural belief that one should honour family and society before the self? These discussions of contradictions have no easy answers, but in critical literacy studies are valuable. Zhang (2015, p.1320) states that students will need time to weigh what constitutes truth in a text and to remember the information they have known before and “determine which ideas need to be modified and how.” Janks (2013, p. 232) sees opportunities in discussion of current controversies in the media which have relevance for students.

5.2.3.Point of view, ideology, beliefs that the reader brings to the text

Student experience is central to critical literacy studies. Group discussions such as Myers and Eberfors (2010, p. 159) explicated students personal experience in the context of the larger society, because experiences that are different from one another in the same culture have real value as the subject of discussion. This however, can be a source of contention in English classrooms according to both Zhang and Janks. Zhang (2015, p.1320) advises teachers to be aware of the “culture of learning, in which the authority of the text is unquestionable.” Allowing the consideration of “multiple meanings and the construction of social (positions)” is a challenge for teachers and students of critical literacy. Janks (2013, p. 230) also describes discourse as the power to serve the interests of the learners. A school curriculum can be written with the purpose of validating the experiences of minority students. The example given is a program in Arizona where “literature was chosen with regard to minority experiences.” The result of the more inclusive program was rectification of structural inequality, “Latino students, historically behind in standardized tests and graduation rates, can catch up with the rest of the student population”.

5.3.Looking at context and inter text

In the category of context and inter text, one discusses the immediate situational context of a text, such as who was the original intended audience, and considerations for the conditions at the time period when the text was written. In discussions of how text is used, context can also refer to the “classroom” whether it be virtual or not. Inter textual references are considered in this category such as references to other films, books or music (Lundahl, 2001,p.101).

5.3.1.The immediate situational context

The immediate situational context of critical literacy studies has varied in these studies because online and media discussions include contexts outside as well as inside classrooms. The process of socialization and acculturation is one that is natural to the online forum, where students have the time to reflect and formulate themselves in an environment that reduces authoritative practices, even if it remains the discussion of a school class online (Myers and Eberfors 2010, p. 167) Murphy et al. (2009, p. 741) studied the diversity of perspectives offered in classroom discussions that offer students a context where critical learning can take place. This is because everyone has prior knowledge that are the skills needed to solve a problem in a group. Also the assumptions that any one individual holds will be challenged and reconciled by the group. In the case of instruction of students of below average abilities, low socio-economic status or ethnic minorities the meta-analysis showed that the context of discussion approaches gave these students the most positive results for reading comprehension, but reasoned that this may be the case because better performing students already possess many skills related to critical thinking (2009, p.755 and 760). Janks (2013, p. 228-229) also emphasises creating contexts where the cultural capital of minorities is taken seriously in the choices of texts, and this means online as well as class-based contexts.

5.3.2.The historical factors that contribute to a text

Not all studies in the review made use of opportunities to discuss texts from the post-colonial or other historical related perspectives. In Bobkina and Stefanova's series of assignments related to the poem "If" by Rudyard Kipling, there does not seem to be an opportunity to discuss the history of British imperialism as a historical context for the author's life. Myers and Eberfors (2010, p. 154) describes a critical literacy that would break from a historically deterministic view of text, to seek "a pedagogy that goes beyond learning "about" a culture's rituals and histories to engage learners in interactions to create a reflective experience on the dialectic between language and culture." Janks is also interested in the breaking free from historical narratives that would limit students in their meaning making, but a difference with Janks is the revisiting of history from an alternative point of view. She describes the conditions under apartheid in South Africa "We taught what came to be known as people's history which challenged the colonial and apartheid versions of history that appeared in the history textbooks approved for use in school" (2013, p. 229-230) She describes similar development in the United States with a Mexican American Studies textbook, "*Rethinking Columbus* (a post-colonial, critical literacy resource book)." Zhang is concerned that ESL students in China lack "appropriate background knowledge of historical, social, and cultural issues in western countries." Zhang has two suggestions for this gap in understanding, one is the encouragement of language learners to interact with native speakers and the other is teacher guidance (2015, p. 1320).

5.3.3.Intertextual references

In making inter textual references the literature varied in how wide of a range of texts would be permitted. Bobkina and Stefanova's (2016, p. 156) comparison of Kipling to another contemporary British poet was a strong contrast to Janks proposal to use "a wide range of differently positioned texts available on the Internet including, amongst others, newspaper reports, film and YouTube videos and legal documents. After analyzing this material critically, students can discuss which positions they support and why" (2013, p. 230). Eberfors text focuses on how participants use "comparative information about cultural practices or beliefs and possible explanations for identities and actions from other cultures." If one was to make a generalizing statement about practices in a culture, one could make inter textual references to prove that the standard exists, but this strategy was not a focus for the study. For Zhang, the comprehension of what is to be expected as typical for textual forms and genres is a first step in evaluating a text critically. Some examples of texts that students should recognize are "every day texts, literary, science" and then "report, argument, exposition, (and) narrative" (2015, p. 1319).

5.4.Social roles and Power relations

In this category the reader considers the implied or expressed roles of the author, the reader and characters in the text. The author may adopt the role of authority or an egalitarian stance, the reader may be assigned a submissive role or one of resistance. The reader notices the people in the text and how they are described as proactive, reactive, or passively acquiescent. Differences in how men and women are described by the text is discussed (Lundahl, 2001,p.101).

5.4.1.The status and assumed or adopted role of the writer

The authority of the writer is a debatable subject for the texts studied to different degrees. Which texts are socially and legally accepted by a society and which ones become censored are a subject for discussion. Myers and Eberfors (2010, p. 156) regards the author's influence as changeable, because "Meaning is always mediated by third signs that carry the underlying

ideologies of participants.” That is, meaning in critical literacy arises in the interpretation apart from what the author created. Janks (2013, p.227) and Zhang (2015, p.1318) both refer to Freire's pedagogical methods in that the identifying the positions of writers/authors is expressly to empower students to critically reflect on the viewpoint in relation to one's own. Therefore critical literacy only exists in a context of discourses with the authorship as we become more insightful through our experiences, therefore entering each encounter with a critical stance. This is a problem for many readers who have a background in more authoritarian views of authors' texts, cautions Zhang (2015, p. 1320). Murphy et al. (2009, p.743) named this “critical-analytic stance” if it corresponded to querying the text in search of the underlying arguments, assumptions, world views, or beliefs, sometimes with the express purpose of exposing the fallibility of the author.

5.4.2.The role assigned to the student

The students role in critical literacy studies describe the students as creators of texts themselves, but vary in how much freedom the students have to alter the text that was the focus of literacy study. Students In Bobkina and Stefanova's (2016,p.687) plan for critical literacy study, the student moves beyond an exposition of the meanings of texts. In the role as an *author* students diagnose which linguistic methods were employed to produce a response in the reader. However, students create their own texts by changing the method or approach but not actual meaning. They can chose to change the genre or even write a continuation of the original text. Janks (2013, p.238) also wants the students to raise their cultural sensitivity and this can happen when they are creators themselves. The students consider their audience and it is a “necessary step for teachers to invite them (students) to think about the effects their texts may have on others. Will they be hurtful? Who will they include and exclude? Is their text racist, homophobic or sexist? Does it assume that all children live in nuclear families with their biological mother and father?” Janks (2013, p.238) calls the entire process of critical literacy studies the **redesign cycle** meaning that they will incorporate the original source text and may completely alter the meaning to one that is relevant to them.

5.4.3.How girls/women are described compared to men

The texts reviewed for this literature study emphasized the need to make discussions of gender roles in literature explicit in critical literacy instruction. Myers and Eberfors (2010, p.151) recognize one of the goals of critical language instruction is an attention to the power relationships inherent in language and so needs prompting to bring students to the explicit realization of their experience of identity that they bring to the text. By recognizing it in texts students can recognize it in themselves. Critical literacy studies of media and culture cannot avoid gender discussions, as Janks' (2013, p.233) example of a painting shows,”Because discussions about ethics, fairness, discourse and identity, values and action are central to critical literacy pedagogy, they educate students to carefully examine the possible social effects of different positions.” Zhang (2015, p. 1319) agrees that gender is an issue to made explicit in critical literacy studies, even if a text is elusive regarding its authorship.

6.Discussion

Here I will discuss insights resulting from this investigation of how critical literacy is taught to raise students comprehension and well being, also how it relates to teaching critical literacy in the context of the ESL/EFL classroom in Sweden.

6.1.Self-reflexive stance

Myers and Eberfors (2010) in particular, who stress inter cultural meetings and experiences are relevant to critical literacy education in Sweden. The course plan is explicit in Sweden that students are given an opportunity to place the reality of their own societal cultural experiences in a global context (Skolverket, 2011). The goal with this method is to raise discussions of micro relations of power in texts and their political (socially constructed) nature of differences such as gender, ethnicity, sexuality, etc. Pennycook (2004) described this sort of problematizing practice in language education as a *self-reflexive stance* to constantly question assumptions, even one's own deeply held beliefs.

Myers and Eberfors (2010) describe the creation of the *intercultural speakers* as a goal for ESL instruction, those who can distance themselves from their own subjective experiences enough to realize that they are by no means the only possible results, and thus becoming accepting of others. The students will be as a result more wary of ideas of ethnocentrism. For Murphy et al. (2009) this encourages the creation of a *critical-analytical stance* that engages students to ask questions and give subjective responses in the search for the underlying assumptions and arguments made by texts.(p.742) Both Myers and Eberfors (2010) and Murphy et al. (2009) recognize that in whatever forum one engages with learners be it virtual or in classroom discussions, the search for world view, ideology or value system in texts is something that teachers must make explicit in their expectations of students in critical literacy instruction.

6.2.Democracy and identity

One's cultural identity is in part constructed as a function of the ideologies we confront in texts. Teachers of critical literacy hope to make these values and beliefs perceptible. Myers and Eberfors (2010) state that this identity creation is many sided, and getting students to recognize this process in themselves and others is a necessary part of a democratic basis for social interaction (p.153). The Swedish curriculum is explicit that it is important to validate our students in their search for identity and grounded in democratic values (Skolverket 2011, p.10-11) Therefore, we incorporate their struggles into our critical reading of texts in their daily lives. Pennycook (2001, p.136) cites J. P. Gee's text in "Postmodernism and Literacies," that "the only way forward at this point is to consider the *effects* on other people of what we do and say" and "One always has the ethical obligation to explicate ... any social practice that there is reason to believe advantages oneself or one's group over other people or groups" (Pennycook 2001, p.136) We who work in English as a foreign language in Swedish classrooms can point to our curriculum that states explicitly "the equal value of all people, equality between women and men, and solidarity with the weak and vulnerable" (Skolverket 2011, p.9).

6.3.Teacher and student talk

Murphy et al. (2009) supports the social interaction of students as the primary motivator of meaning making and literary participation in a sociocultural tradition (p.741). The increase in student talk was observed by Murphy et al. (2009) in critical-analytic approaches, this is a positive development in a language classroom, when students get more opportunities to train in the target language. The meta-analysis showed positive results for student comprehension when studying English as a second language, especially text-explicit, or efferent approaches. Murphy et al (2009, p. 760) states " it would appear that these classroom discussion formats allowed students to have more classroom time to share their thoughts." Another important aspect for teachers of English to consider is time, the longer these critical literacy approaches were implemented, the stronger the effect on promoting student talk. Also, for the general

comprehension of a text, it took less time for students to show gains in general comprehension of a text, than text-explicit or text implicit approaches. The exact time frame should be formulated with caution, but effect sizes were greatest up to three weeks for general comprehension and up to 24 weeks for text-explicit/implicit approaches (Murphy 2009, p.757). It is therefore possible that the visible learning and active learning methods that have been observed in some methods of instruction do not allow time for critical reflection. The key finding in the discussion based approaches is that they have a positive effect on student comprehension, thinking and reasoning. It is important to note however that the researchers in this study were positive to all discussion approaches reviewed, “ in our judgement, regardless of the primary goal as evident in the published literature, all of the discussion approaches have potential to promote students’ high-level thinking and comprehension of text” (Murphy et al. 2009, p.742).

6.4.Comprehension or critical thinking

Murphy et al. (2009) identified separate abilities that were strengthened in students as a result of critical literacy discussions in the classrooms, and that can have meaning for teachers of English as a second language. While some methods promote comprehension, others were more effective for students critical thinking, reasoning, and argumentation about and around text (Murphy et al., 2009, p.759-760). For example, efferent reading methods, that is, through queries and seeking information in a text did not necessarily produce better argumentation skills and critical thinking in students, although it was effective at raising students reading comprehension. Therefore when analysing the grammatical choices of a text it would be wise not to forget how the explicit and implicit meanings also promote the expressive/aesthetic response in reading comprehension. Bobkina and Stefanova (2016, p. 684) also express this concern for a model that balances text-analytic methods and student reflection.

6.5.Identity and minority perspectives

The Swedish school curriculum states that a goal for the school is appreciation of diversity and nurturing of student identity creation (Skolverket, 2011, p. 9). Bobkina and Stefanova(2016, p.679) describe the process of critical literacy instruction as an exercise in the students' personal recollection of experiences in relation to the text. The students are expected to share their experiences with one another, and this idea has its roots in post-colonial or gender studies, but that varied experience is made explicit in the final assignment. Janks (2013, p.228) points out that the implicit use of the dominant language in a society has the power to position minority students by reproducing the circumstances they find themselves in, that is illegitimate and not recognised . What we can take from this is, in order to create an inclusive environment, and work in the manner stated in the Swedish curriculum in relation to *democratic working forms* (Skolverket 2011, p.10) we should use texts that recognize the voice of minority students, or allow students to reformulate the texts in ways that do, as in the case of an assignment to write what being a man means for them nowadays.

7.Conclusions

Some aspects of critical language teaching can said to be typical of critical literacy in the choice of texts, methods and goals, and are applicable to teaching students in Sweden. The choice of language texts is varied, non-textual elements of communication that arise from the students daily experiences are welcomed as texts for study. Validation of student experience is in concurrence with the Swedish curriculum, by making explicit discussions of student

experience and identity issues, and by raising students sensitivity of the power of language to include or exclude individuals. There is a strong connection in critical literacy studies between thinking skills and democratic agency and change. The evidence suggests that including the experience of students with very different backgrounds is beneficial socially and academically. Critical inquiries into the meanings of texts engages students and when this is done explicitly it improves student reading comprehension on standardized tests.

The wide range of texts that can be incorporated into critical literacy studies is a welcome part of teaching English in Sweden. Only one text for review in this study cited a problem with access to computers or tablets as a limiting factor in their classrooms. The positive result of this is motivated students who, as in the introduction, wanted to read a president's speech on immigration. By considering aspects of critical literacy that are presented in this literature review, the challenge might be welcomed to engage with motivated students the world outside of the classroom. That is the goal of critical literacy and sometimes a point of contention in schools, but as of this writing not a point of contention for teachers of English in Sweden.

The research supports a holistic approach to language learning, whereby language structures are made explicit, texts are chosen with the intention of questioning the beliefs or values they assume and students funds of knowledge are utilized through open discussions. Critical literacies build upon basic comprehension of a text to a critical analytical stance. Through reflection over meaning, a dialogic process develops between the reader and the author of a text in contexts of cultural and ideological awareness. Creating a classroom climate where tolerance of difference and questioning the authority of a text is welcomed requires time. The dominant or accepted cultural, ideological, economic, and class-based differences outside of the school are a part of the context of critical literacy instruction in the classroom. In some aspects this can be helpful in foreign language instruction, to point out how difference within the same culture is used in other lands where English is the native language can be enlightening, illustrating the power of discourse. This factor, time, is a challenge for teaching reading comprehension in Sweden, the negative trend in PISA results could be seen in in the context of budget and personnel constraints on schools in general.

7.1. Investigating these methods further

In Murphy et al. (2009, p. 742) nine different programs were reviewed for the effects of classroom discussion. A possible study could look at what methods or programs been used in Sweden, or if they can compare to the Swedish curriculum. Lundahl names the *Questioning the Author* program specifically. What types of strategies exactly were those that showed gains in both literal and implicit comprehension? One program, “Instructional Conversations” was used most often with English language learners, why? Also the method explained by Janks (2013) seems hard to explain without actually doing it in a direct and relevant way, it would be interesting to try doing Janks' interdependency model together with Swedish students relating it to something meaningful for themselves.

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likvärdighet har svensk skola förlorat sin forna topposition: skillnaderna i resultat mellan infödda elever och elever med utländsk bakgrund är en av de största i hela PISA 2009

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Primary Articles	Type	Concepts	Method	Analysis	Findings	Group	Strength	Weakness
Eberfors, F. and Myers, J.(2010)	Primary research	Inter cultural critical literacy	Web forum	Quantitative study in discourse analysis	1.Students are motivated to share their experiences, 2.Explicit formulation of purpose of inquiry is necessary, 3. Reflections on the self as well as others give good results, 4. Five patterns of mediation -1.asserting (or confirming another's response) 2. comparing to how people in own culture might act in a similar way; 3. exploring possible beliefs and values that might contextualize cultural identities or actions, diversify the meaning of the identities or actions, or explain why or how cultural practices exist; 4. seeking comparative information about cultural practices or beliefs and possible explanations for identities and actions from other cultures; and 5. posing self-reflective questions or problems about one's cultural practices, how practices shape beliefs and values, and how identities and actions might be transformed (p.156)	Teacher students in USA and Sweden	Relevant to teaching ESL in Sweden, high validity	Only 99 internet posts, small sample size
Murphy, K.,	Review	Critical	Literature	Meta-analysis,	1.Instruction was highly effective for	Students	Covers several	Leaves out

Wilkinson, I., Soter, A., Hennessey, M.(2009)	article	thinking, reader-response theory(Book Club) efferent stance(Ques. The author)	review of 9 critical literacy programs	comparison of comprehension and critical thinking results for nine different programs for instruction aimed at critical literacy approaches	better reading comprehension and sometimes for critical thinking, 2.Increases in student talk did not always correlate to better comprehension, 3.Discussions are very good at helping English language learners or academically weak students with comprehension 4.Results vary widely with different groups and measures 4.The longer these methods were used, the more increase in student talk, highest effect for general comprehension seen at 3 weeks or less, highest effect for implicit/explicit approaches at 24 weeks or less(use these estimates with caution)	in all age groups from grade one to college age	decades of instruction in US, high reliability	certain aspects of critical literacy that the Swedish curriculum does not, covers decades before the present when many other factors are different today
Zhang, G.(2015)	Review article	Critical Literacy	Literature review	Comparison and synthesis of source texts on critical literacy instruction	1. A disadvantage for ESL learners in non-english speaking countries is that students may be lacking to background and cultural references in texts, 2. A critical stance in ESL may be easier for students in non-english speaking countries because they are often not the intended audience for texts 3.Critical literacy is hard to practice where the culture of learning is an	ESL teachers in China	Addresses ESL issues and concerns from a non-western perspective	Relies very much on theoretical concepts,

					authoritarian view of texts			
Bobkina, J., and Stefanova, S.(2016)	Conference proceeding	Critical Literacy	Synthesis of critical reading with critical pedagogy to teach critical thinking	A detailed program of study	Critical literacy should be integrated with literature based holistic instruction that focuses on the readers response to result in better critical thinking skills	ESL teachers in Spain	Covers many key concepts of reading comprehension, a synthesis of different perspectives	Is a part of a pilot project, about a year old
Janks, H.(2013)	Perspective article	Critical Literacy	Interdependence model of CL theory as it relates to curriculum, pedagogy and research	Three examples of critical literacy programs, that have, or could be put into practice	An interdependent model for CL is a concrete method for addressing current problems such as identity, diversity and sustainability, in a world with differential access and inequality	ESL teachers of ethnic minority students in South Africa and USA	Validating the experience of minorities/ESL students gave better results on standardised tests	Is itself a critical literacy theory