

Literary Form in the Swedish Upper-Secondary ESL Classroom: Policy and Practice

A Critical Study of the National Syllabus for English in Relation to
Practical Teaching and Student Learning

Author: Jakob Winnberg

Supervisor: Maria Olaussen

Examiner: Niklas Salmose

Semester: Fall 2014

Course code: G01304

Abstract

This thesis presents a critical study of the Swedish national syllabus for upper-secondary English in relation to practical teaching and student learning as pertains to one specific aspect of the central content for English 5 and 6: literary form. Proceeding from the observation that this aspect is conceptually vague, the study investigates how teachers approach it in their teaching, and what student experiences indicate about the learning outcomes of that teaching. Hence, the study uses a qualitative method, albeit with a quantitative element, basing its analysis and discussion on the results of questionnaires distributed to teachers and students at one Swedish upper-secondary school.

The results show that literary form is indeed taught – but it seems to be so to varying degrees, with varying underlying conceptualizations (especially as pertains to the relation between form and content), with varying principles of assessment, and with varying learning outcomes. It is taught largely in terms of genre as a primary principle, yet largely not in terms of genre pedagogy with an eye on productive skills, but rather focusing on receptive skills (that is, fostering a deeper ability to appreciate literary texts); thus, in practice, upper-secondary English in Sweden is not taken simply as a language-acquisition subject.

However, the results also indicate that the vagueness of the syllabus results in a lack of shared vision among teachers, which together with factors such as gaps in teachers' practical theories very probably adversely affects course and programme alignment as well as educational equivalency between classes, programmes, and schools.

Keywords: literary form, upper-secondary school, English, pedagogical alignment, educational equivalency, policy, practice

Table of contents

1. Introduction	3
Area of research, aims, claims	3
Theoretical and methodological background	10
Previous research	15
2. Results	22
Results of teacher questionnaire	22
Results of student questionnaire	28
3. Analysis and discussion	33
4. Conclusion	39
5. Works cited	41
6. Appendices	43
Appendix 1: Teacher questionnaire	44
Appendix 2: Student questionnaire	46

1. Introduction

The students should absolutely have a grasp of what they should do and understand what they do 100%. In this context it is not like that since form surely may be interpreted in many ways.

—Swedish upper-secondary student¹

Area of research, aims of study, claims

In the context of the teaching of ESL (English as a Second Language), literature didactics might in the first instance reasonably be understood to concern the effective use of literature as both *subject* and *medium* of language learning. In this view, literature provides both the content *of* and models *for* communicative practice, as well as a basis for building intercultural competency; the task of ESL literature didactics would thus be to develop concrete classroom and assessment practice in relation to that notion.

Yet, didactics is a broader field than what is assumed in the view sketched above. And it has to be so, as the framework of didactic practice goes way beyond the classroom and the notion the teacher as professional has of what it means to understand their subject, taking in centrally stipulated educational aims that are manifested in national curricula and standardized tests.

In other words, the task of the professional here is not simply to determine how particular aspects of English are best taught and learnt, but to translate specific aspects *of the curriculum* into informed practice. To use Eliot Freidson's helpful distinction, one might say that the "professional logic" of the teacher here comes up against the "bureaucratic logic" of politicians and, in the case of Swedish upper-secondary education, the Swedish National

¹ Answer to questionnaire used in this study; see below, page 32.

Agency for Education (Skolverket).² Be that as it may, the problem here is that the bureaucratic logic is not quite transparent, as the national curriculum and the subject-specific syllabuses contained therein are, as it were, open to interpretation. If teachers are to make sense of the curriculum in the interests of implementing it in pedagogical practice, they must perform a rather elaborate discourse analysis – or, struggling to find time even for a coffee break, wait for someone to come along and do it for them.

A case in point in this regard forms the topic of this thesis: the positing of literary form as part of the “central content”³ in the syllabuses for English step 5 and 6 in the Swedish upper-secondary school system (in accordance with the GY2011 reform). It might be good to remind ourselves of the details here: In the “subject plan” for upper-secondary English,⁴ “content and form in different kinds of fiction” are part of the central content for step 5, whilst the alternatively phrased “form and content in film and literature” are to be studied in step 6 (Skolverket, “English 120912” 3, 7).⁵ Step 7 states, in terms not quite consistent with those of the previous steps and also somewhat cryptic, that students should learn “[h]ow oral and written communications in different genres are built up” and “[h]ow stylistics [*sic*] and rhetorical devices are used for different purposes and how language is used as an instrument to exercise power” (11).

Significantly, however, “form” is not defined in the supplementary comments (Skolverket, “Alla kommentarer”), nor does it appear explicitly in the grading criteria (or

² See Freidson, who identifies three distinct “logics” struggling for dominion in organizations: the bureaucratic logic, the market-directed logic, and what he terms “the third logic”, that of professionalism. Of course, in the case above, there is some degree of dialectic relationship, as curricula and subject plans are drawn up with some participation of professionals.

³ “Centralt innehåll” in Swedish.

⁴ “Ämnesplan” in Swedish.

⁵ In the interests of brevity and manageability, I have limited the scope of this study to *literary* form, although the subject plan stipulates that form in fiction understood broadly – for instance, as covering film – should be dealt with.

“knowledge requirements”) of the subject plan. It is made clear in the comments, though, that the focus on “stylistics and rhetorical devices” in step 7 is about application of such devices in students’ own oral and written production, rather than application of concepts in their reception/analysis (9).⁶ The most significant point here, though, is that “form” as an aspect of literature is not a fixed, transparent concept – a point made clear by a cursory glance at the books most readily at hand as I am writing this. J.A. Cuddon’s classic *Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory* defines “the form of a literary work” as “its shape and structure and ... its style ... as opposed to its substance or what it is about”, but also as “the kind of work – the genre ... to which it belongs” (327) – thus, shape, structure, style, genre would all come into play in a discussion of literary form. Yet, if we search the index of Kelley Griffith’s popular undergraduate guide *Writing Essays about Literature* for an entry on “form”, we find that it states “Form, literary. *See* structure” (288) – thus, form would equal structure, which according to Griffith means, in the case of prose fiction, “plot” as exemplified by the “Freytag pyramid” (41-42), in the case of drama, “structural divisions”, that is “acts and scenes” (72), and in the case of poetry, the “logical plan” and the “pattern of sounds”, including “stanza” and “rhyme scheme” (115). Turning to Raman Selden’s *The Theory of Criticism*, however, we encounter a distinction between “Form, System and Structure” (243ff). In other words, form comes in many shapes and forms.

Thus, a plethora of questions suggest themselves, among which are:

- How are we to understand “form” in the context of the subject plan for upper-secondary English – in terms of a rhetoric approach, a stylistics approach, a narratology approach, or a genre theory approach? Through the theoretical prism of Russian formalism, the New Criticism, structuralism, or post-structuralism?

⁶ “Det handlar här om tillämpning, inte specifikt om att kunna benämna de grepp som används” (9); “It is here a matter of application, not specifically of being able to name the devices used” (my translation).

- How are we to understand its relation to “content”? What, if anything, does the semantically barren conjunction “and” tell us?
- How are we to understand its relation to the grading criteria?
- What ways, if any, are there of glimpsing the *intentions* underlying the subject plan as pertains to the aspect of “form”? *Why* “form”? In order to develop *receptive* skills or *productive* skills, or both?
- What are feasible ways of studying “form” in step 5 and 6, respectively? (And what of step 7, where “form” is not explicitly mentioned?)
- Should the distinction seemingly made between “form” and “content” itself be problematized, especially in relation to what is typically most adolescent students’ more immediate literary response or need: identification, be it psychological, existential or ethical?⁷ In effect, should “form” and “content” ideally be taught as a seamless whole lest the student fail to see the relevance of the former to the latter?
- How do teachers in general seem to understand the above issues? And how do they implement their understanding in their teaching?

To phrase these questions as one, we may consider the realization of the curriculum to consist in the following chain:

“Aims of the subject” (“Ämnets syfte”) → “Central content” (“Centralt innehåll”) → “Grading criteria” (“Kunskapskrav”) → teachers’ course construction and lesson planning → actual classroom practice → students’ learning → assessment.

The main question posed in this study is what happens to “form” in that chain. The more specific sub-questions posed are, accordingly:

⁷ Solid support for this view of students’ most immediate need is found J.A. Appleyard’s classic study *Becoming a Reader* (see especially 101-107), the findings of which have been repeated in subsequent research.

1. *Is form taught?*
2. *How is it taught?* According to what understanding of the concept, and by what method(s)?
3. *What impact* does the teaching have on student learning? (E.g., whether students have come to understand literary form; what the nature of their understanding is; what their conception of the usefulness of understanding form is.)
4. What questions do the answers to 1-3 raise about the syllabus and the realization, including learning outcomes, of it? And what answers might these very answers at the same time provide for those questions?

Involved here is also the issue of whether upper-secondary English in Sweden is to be taken simply as a language-acquisition subject, or whether the intention of the national curriculum is to move it, throughout steps 5, 6 and 7, closer to Swedish as a subject, which would mean not simply working on *acquiring* the language, but on performing ever-more-complex cognitive tasks *in* the language. Depending on which is the case, there are different implications for how the curriculum's reference to literary form is to be understood and implemented – above all, whether literary form should be restricted to more linguistic features, or should take in the whole battery of formal aspects of literature. At any rate, the subject plan for English is less precise than the one for Swedish in this respect. The former states under “Aim of the subject” that students should develop an “[u]nderstanding of spoken and written English, and also the ability to *interpret content*” (2; my emphasis). The latter, though, states under the same heading that students should acquire “[k]nowledge of *genres* as well as *narrative techniques* and *stylistic features in fiction*” (2; my emphases). The central content of the latter is also much more specific: step 1 specifies “[k]ey themes, narrative techniques and common stylistic features in fictional narratives” (Skolverket, “Swedish” 3),

step 2 specifies “[l]iterary devices” and “[k]ey literary concepts and their use” (7), while step 3 specifies “literary analysis of stylistic devices and narrative techniques” (10).

It would seem, then, from this brief act of discourse analysis, that English as a subject here is much more about language acquisition and reception of content, whereas Swedish leans towards the acquisition of literary critical skills – which leads to a reiteration of the question: Why, or more fruitfully put *whither*, literary form in upper-secondary English in the Swedish school system?

The fact that the answer to that question is not self-evident should be sufficient ground for making the following contentions:

- The vagueness of the curriculum as pertains to the study of literary form, in conjunction with the variation in teachers’ professional training and hence their conceptualization of literary form, risks leading to a lack of rigour in the individual teacher’s practice (through no real fault of their own) – particularly in assessment of student learning, as the central content in question is not explicitly mirrored in the grading criteria.
- More seriously, it risks leading to a lack of shared vision among teachers both locally and nationally.
- The above two effects would then jointly lead to shortcomings in educational equivalency between classes/teaching groups, programmes, and schools. (Part of the problem here would also be a resultant variation in course alignment (the alignment of course plan, learning process and assessment to attain transparency as pertains to expected learning outcomes, and to attain holistic and deep-approach learning),⁸ as well as in programme alignment (the alignment of courses vis-à-vis the overriding goals of a given programme).)

⁸ The theoretical background to this principle of alignment is laid out below.

- Faced with such vagueness, and in the interests of educational equivalency, it will be up to teachers to negotiate *collectively* between (un-)stated policy and their own professionalism, in a process aimed at realizing the subject plan in an efficacious manner.

While the last one of these contentions falls outside the boundaries of my discussion here, my aim has been to try the first three contentions against observations made at one sample school and discuss the results of these observations. My thesis is thus mainly constituted by a description and interpretation of data concerning: a) teachers' interpretation of policy, b) teachers' classroom practice, c) students' experiences in relation to a) and b). But it also partly addresses the question of what a), b), and c) imply about syllabus realization, pedagogical alignment, and educational equivalency.

My primary claims, based on the findings of my investigation in relation to the first three of the four guiding questions posed above, are as follows: Literary form is indeed taught – but it seems to be so to varying degrees, with varying underlying conceptualizations (especially as pertains to the relation between form and content), with varying principles of assessment, and with varying learning outcomes. It is taught largely in terms of genre as a primary principle, yet largely not in terms of genre pedagogy with an eye on productive skills, but rather focusing on receptive skills (that is, fostering a deeper ability to appreciate literary texts); thus, in practice, upper-secondary English in Sweden is not taken simply as a language-acquisition subject.

However, based on the above findings in relation to the fourth question, I would also hazard the secondary claims that that there are gaps in teachers' individual practical theories, and that there is a lack of shared vision among teachers, both of which very probably adversely affect course and programme alignment as well as educational equivalency between

classes, programmes, and schools. Given the nature of the (un-)stated policy, the remedy to this situation will have to lie in teachers' collectively negotiating a joint policy.

I shall now proceed to further prepare for the presentation and subsequent analysis/discussion of the results of my investigation by presenting an outline of the theories and methods underpinning my investigation, as well as an overview of previous research regarding the teaching of literary form in the English classroom in general and in the EFL/ESL classroom in particular.

Theoretical and methodological background

As stated above, the study rests on an empirical-qualitative method in its more investigative part. In its more analytical/deliberative part, it rests above all on theories of the use of literature in ESL. I discuss these more immediate underpinnings of the analytical/deliberative part further below in the "Previous research" section. Here, I will in what follows briefly address curriculum theory and the principle of alignment as they pertain to my analysis, after which I will elaborate on the methodological basis of the investigative part.

When it comes to curriculum theory, there has been much debate about whether curricula should be kept vague or aim for precision. At least in the last few decades, there has been a clear trend towards leaving precise decisions to the professionals, and thus to offer general, abstractly phrased guidelines in curricula.⁹ However, as E.D. Hirsch, Jr. and John Holdren argue, while "vague guidelines may express worthwhile goals, it is difficult to imagine how *any* such guidelines could form the basis of a coherent, effective education" (11). Roger Kaufman and Fenwick English similarly construct a sharp polemic against the principle of curriculum vagueness, contending that "[a] school system cannot be coordinated

⁹ This tendency indeed entails a privileging of the professional logic over the bureaucratic logic, to use Freidson's terms once more.

properly if it does not explain precisely what is being taught and what method is being used to organize the program of instruction or divide the curriculum” (156). While one may not concur with the painstakingly regulated approach suggested by these scholars,¹⁰ one might still wish for some further degree of precision than what is usually on offer. In Sweden, the pendulum has indeed swung back somewhat towards precision with GY2011, but while course content has been centralized and grading criteria made somewhat more precise, there is still a lack of explicit alignment of content and criteria, and what is more, vagueness persists, as evidenced by the aspect of the English syllabus under scrutiny in this study. The important lesson of the studies cited above is that such vagueness always brings with it the risk of both faltering educational equivalency and inadequate learning outcomes.

Related to the above issue is the theory, or principle, of pedagogical alignment, by which my analysis is also informed. As Karen L. Sanzo et al. put it, alignment in its most basic sense means “linking what is tested with the written and taught curriculum” (44). However, this model of alignment is not sufficient if the goal is genuine learning, as “it addresses the issue of test validity, but on its own says nothing about instruction” (44). Thus, it needs to be completed by what Sanzo et al. term “Deep Pedagogical Alignment”, which refers to “the degree to which instructional methods outlined in lessons plans are carried out in the classroom and will ensure students will learn and retain information” (44-45). In other words, pedagogical alignment conceptualizes, as I put it above, the alignment of course plan, learning process and assessment to attain transparency as pertains to expected learning outcomes, and to attain holistic and deep-approach learning.¹¹

¹⁰ For a corrective view, see Michael Apple’s frankly rather nightmarish description of the consequences of an overzealously regulating curriculum.

¹¹ It should be noted that the concept of alignment has primarily been popularized by John Biggs and Catherine Tang, using the phrase “constructive alignment”, albeit in a theory of *university* learning; see Biggs 95ff.

As for the investigative part of this study, the main empirical material used is data from questionnaires distributed to English teachers and third-year students taking English 7 at a Swedish upper-secondary school. Combining the views of teachers and students resulted, as I thought it would, in data richer in both corroborations and discrepancies. The reason for limiting the data to third-year students was that these would have experience of both English 5 and English 6, and would thus be better equipped to reflect on the issue at hand (and, it should also be noted, would not need the consent of legal guardians to participate in the study); the reason for limiting the data to students taking English 7 was that these would also clearly have passed English 5 and 6. When it comes to the questionnaires, they were qualitative rather than quantitative, although they may be said to include a quantitative element, not least in the case of the student questionnaire, which was answered by a significantly greater number of informants, and included two Yes/No-type questions. In effect, though, the questionnaires used here border on interviews. Yet, questionnaires were preferred to individual interviews, since the interest lay in gathering data on general tendencies. What is more, the amount of data thus gathered largely corresponds to the amount usually gained through interviews once answers have been condensed in transcription to get rid of redundancies and noise. It should be added that the gathering of data in question was carried out in full accordance with the principles stipulated by the Swedish Research Council.¹²

Both questionnaires briefly introduced the purpose of this study, and pointed out that literary form is part of the central content of English steps 5 and 6 as established by the national curriculum.¹³ The questions that were put to teachers were:

- How do you understand the concept of “form” here as pertains to literature?

¹² These are: the principle of information, the principle of consent, the principle of confidentiality, and the principle of usage (cf. Patel and Davidson 62-64). For full details of the questionnaires, see the Appendix section.

¹³ See Appendix section for details.

- When literary form is a designated part of an English course you teach, how do you usually go about teaching it?
- How do you go about assessing student learning when it comes to literary form?
- How do you envisage the relation between form and *content*? In what ways is an attention to form relevant to discussions of content?
- In your experience, how do students react to formal analysis of literature?

The questions that were put to students were (phrased in Swedish to facilitate understanding):¹⁴

- How do you interpret the concept of “form” here? What do you believe/consider to be meant by the “form” of a literary text?
- According to what you remember, was literary form brought up/discussed when you took English 5 and 6? [Yes/No boxes] If “Yes”, try to describe what was brought up/discussed and how.
- According to what you remember, did you carry out formal analyses of literary texts as part of the assessment (test/assignments) in English 5 and/or 6? [Boxes for “Yes, orally”, “Yes, in writing”, “Yes, orally and in writing”, and “No”]
- In what ways might it be important/useful to learn about formal aspects of literary texts?

The final question is especially important in terms of the issue of alignment and holistic learning, since, if it is not clear what literary form is doing in the curriculum, alignment and holism will collapse, which will in turn impair genuine learning.

In the case of the students, one version of the questionnaire was first given to one group of students. Their answers were analyzed to see whether the questions needed tweaking, and a revised questionnaire was subsequently distributed to a second group. The results from the

¹⁴ See Appendix section for original Swedish phrasing.

first group indicated that there might have been some confusion as to what was meant by “literature”, and that some students might not have read carefully enough to realize that the questions concerned *literary* texts. To ensure that students understood that the questions concerned literature in the stricter sense, the following changes to the questionnaire were made: the phrase “litteraturens formmässiga aspekter” (the formal aspects of literature) was changed to “skönlitteraturens formmässiga aspekter” and all occurrences of the word “litterär” (literary) were underlined;¹⁵ moreover, the following clause was appended to the end of the “Background” section: “och de rör litterära texter, dvs. romaner, noveller, dikter, drama” (“and they concern literary texts, i.e. novels, short stories, poems, drama”). Moreover, question four was rephrased slightly. Indeed, the results from the second group proved these amendments effective, if not universally so.¹⁶

I should also point out that, while I did not receive as elaborate replies as I might have hoped for from all the teacher informants, the combined replies are enough to gain some insight and understanding as regards the implementation of the aspect of the syllabus under scrutiny here. In hindsight, however, I think I should have included one more question in the teacher questionnaire, similar to question four in the student questionnaire: “How does the focus on literary form relate to the other aspects of the syllabus? What reasons might one give for teaching literary form as part of upper-secondary English?” Even though question five in the teacher questionnaire mirrored question four in the student questionnaire, asking that sixth question would have allowed for more reflection on pedagogical holism and alignment on the part of the teachers, and would thus have provided more insight into whether such reflection takes place, and, if so, to what extent – and what is more, to what extent the results of such reflection are relayed to students.

¹⁵ “Skönlitteratur” would most immediately correspond to “Literature (with a capital L)”.

¹⁶ To be absolutely clear, the implication here is not that the first round of questionnaires was useless, but rather that a few individual responses indicated a need for some degree of clarification.

Now, keeping all the above in mind for the empirical-qualitative part of this study, let us move on to delineating the underpinnings of the analytical/deliberative part further.

Previous research

Since GY2011 is still very much a new curriculum, there is a dearth of literature concerning it, both in general and in the case of the subject of English in particular. Hence, the issue of literary form as pertains to Swedish upper-secondary ESL has not been previously investigated. In fact, even when donning less parochial glasses, it is hard to come by studies or practical guides that deal particularly with the issue of form/formal analysis in the ESL classroom. For instance, Jeremy Harmer's popular *The Practice of English Language Teaching* barely touches on literature at all, and insofar as it does, it does not consider literary analysis. Yet, there are sources that at least tangentially address the issue of form and formal analysis in the English classroom, albeit in most instances not from a Swedish educational perspective.

Significantly, though, Penny Ur's *A Course in English Language Teaching* – another popular title – devotes but two out of three-hundred pages to “Literature as a component of the English course” (223-25). As “advantages” of using literature in the EFL/ESL classroom, Ur lists that it can “be enjoyable and motivating”, “widen students’ horizons”, encourage “empathetic, critical and creative thinking”, provide “examples of different styles of writing, and representations of various authentic uses of the language”, be “a good basis for vocabulary expansion”, and develop “reading skills” (223-24). Crucially, though, Ur urges us not to “over-analyse”, as “detailed literary analysis” may “dilute the impact” of the literary work (225). However, she also contends that “[t]he exception to the above is the aspect of style ... [i]f there are stylistic features that contribute to the impact” (225) – yet offers no basis for this contention.

A similar conclusion is reached by Sandra Lee McKay, who brings up practising the four skills and raising cross-cultural awareness as reasons for bringing literature into ESL/EFL classes, but significantly also argues that “because literary texts depend on how the language is used to create a particular effect, literature demonstrates for learners the importance of form in achieving specific communicative goals” (319). In other words, “[w]hat makes literary texts unique is that in literature the what and how of the text are inseparable” (319), which “makes literature valuable for extending learner’s awareness that how they say something is important in two ways. First, how something is said often contributes to speakers’ achieving their purpose in communication; and second, in deciding how something is said, speakers often communicate something about themselves – they establish their voice” (319). McKay’s view is thus fairly “extraliterarily” instrumentalist, in that it treats the focus on literary form as a vehicle for developing students’ communicative skills. Indeed, she seems to largely concur with several scholars she cites who maintain “that literary texts should be read and enjoyed and that literary analysis necessarily undermines this possibility” (321). Similar to Ur, though, yet with more reasoning, she points out that “[if] ... stylistics provides learners with the tools to justify their own opinions of a text, then the analysis of a text can be related to the student’s own aesthetic reading of it” (321; “aesthetic reading” is used here in the sense of “reading for enjoyment”).

If one detects in the above a wariness in regard to bringing literature, not to mention a focus on its formal aspects, into the EFL/ESL classroom, Alan Maley offers some degree of corrective. As Maley notes, in TESOL there are indeed “three ... reasons usually given for the teaching of literature: the cultural model, the language model and the personal growth model” (182); this is indeed something we could glimpse in both Ur and McKay, and which we may glimpse further in a few of the authors discussed below. However, Maley also points to more recent interest in literary texts as “the object of study ... studied for their literary qualities”,

that is “academic analysis of literary texts” (181). Furthermore, he refers to other scholars arguing that “students are frequently exposed to literary texts as if they already knew how to tackle them”, which may result in “a kind of pseudo-literary competence” (181). The remedy would be to have students “progressively introduced and sensitised to the devices through which literature achieves its special effects before they embark upon a fully-fledged study of particular literary works” (181). Yet, in his focus on the language classroom, Maley too ultimately falls back on the notion of literature as mainly having “the potential to generate interactive language work which is meaningful and stimulating” (184).

A similar attempt to move beyond the “usual reasons” is found in Gillian Lazar’s guide to using literature in language teaching, in which form is considered largely under the heading of “linguistic features”, where she includes metaphor, simile, assonance, alliteration, ambiguity, and mixing of styles/registers (6-7). She does however, albeit all but in passing, touch upon aspects such as narrative point of view (74-5, 86, 199), and her answer to the question “Why use literature in the language classroom?” (14) goes beyond reasons such as language acquisition, cultural understanding and encouragement of students’ expression of opinions and feelings, to include “expanding students’ [formal] language awareness” (18) and “developing students’ interpretative abilities” (19). Lazar’s primary focus is clearly linguistic, though, which is understandable, as she is discussing the use of literature in the *language* classroom. At face value, it would hence seem that Lazar’s position gels with that of the Swedish national curriculum. Indeed, that position is more or less subject to consensus as far as language-acquisition methodology is concerned, as should be clear from the other authors discussed above.

The authoritative book on the teaching of English in the Swedish school system, however, is surely Bo Lundahl’s *Engelsk Språkdidaktik (English Language Didactics)*, recently published in a revised second edition to meet the demands of GY2011. It is thus of

the highest interest in the context of my investigation to see what Lundahl's chapter on literature ("Skönlitteratur") has to offer as regards the issue of literary form. Lundahl does quote the syllabuses' references to "form", but he does not go on to problematize these references. Instead, he proceeds to make a case for the introduction of basic literary terms in ESL literary studies: "If texts are to be analysed in a more profound fashion it is apt to use a few basic terms" (410; my translation).¹⁷ He then rather drily adds the argument that such an approach is a requirement of upper-secondary ESL in Sweden (410).¹⁸ Later on in the chapter, in a discussion of "close reading" broadly understood, he adds that "[a] few basic terms might also be useful" in that context, and lists "a few of the most common ones": "*setting, plot, character/characterization, narrator/narrative, point of view and theme*" (418; terms in italics are in English in the original). Yet, there is no clear indication given that these terms are thus what he takes "form" to imply in the syllabus – and if they are what he takes it to imply, there is no mention of how he arrived at that particular conclusion. We thus potentially face a situation where teachers read "form" in the syllabus, and then go to Lundahl to find that apparently this means the terms listed above, after which they proceed to teach those terms. This situation would have the benefit of effecting educational equivalency – but it would still be based on an educated guess and very little problematization or reflection.

Moving beyond ESL to a more general theory of the teaching of literature to adolescents, we find Judith A. Langer's seminal *Envisioning Literature*, which offers a firmly empirically based such theory. We also find that Langer devotes only a brief chapter redolent of the afterthought to the question of form. In this chapter, she sketches the place of "literary concepts and vocabulary", or "literary elements and structure", in "the envisionment-building classroom" (132). Her conclusion is that, "[i]n such classrooms, literary concepts become an

¹⁷ "Om texter ska analyseras på ett mera fördjupat sätt är det funktionellt att använda några grundläggande termer".

¹⁸ "Ett annat argument för ett litteraturstudium är att gymnasiestudierna i engelska ... kräver det".

integral part of how the students think about and express ideas. The literary language they learn grows from their involvement in discussions that matter” (143). Apparently, then, literary form does not really matter, except in the service of discussions of the ideas generated by literature (which is, roughly, what Langer means by envisionment-building). To my mind, an important insight is thus missing in Langer’s account: that form itself might be an idea generated by literature, or intrinsic to how literature generates other types of ideas, and that one part of envisionment-building might be to help students see this and how it might matter. Implicit in Langer’s model is, accordingly, a rather sharp division between form and content, which I think is not very helpful if we wish to see how “content and form in different kinds of fiction” might assume a place in our ESL teaching and learning (Skolverket, “English 120912” 3). At any rate, Langer’s model squares with the third reason for literary studies we saw noted by Maley: personal growth.

Another contribution to a more general theory of the place of literature in adolescent education is found in J.A. Appleyard’s *Becoming a Reader*, which is of special interest here as it presents a theory of the psychological development of fiction readers from childhood to adulthood, and must thus undoubtedly inform a discussion of how questions of literary form might tenably enter late adolescent learning. Appleyard notably reserves the issue of sustained literary interpretation along formal lines for his discussion of early adulthood, “College and Beyond: The Reader as Interpreter” (121ff). In the previous section of his book, “Adolescence: The Reader as Thinker”, he concludes from research on the literary critical abilities of American high school students that “when questioned about their reactions to particular stories, teenagers tend to give three kinds of responses: ... They explicitly mention the experience of involvement with the book and identification with the character ... They talk about the realism of the story ... And they say that a good story makes them think” (100).

This is the mind-set that the analysis of literary form would thus come up against in upper-secondary schools; as Appleyard argues,

[t]o get beyond this into techniques of analysis and the categories of literary criticism is something the best students may get a glimpse of and some may appear to be good at because they are clever at imitating the language of their teachers, but it finally requires a new way of looking at a story – as a problem of textual interpretation – that is substantially different from the adolescent’s impulse to think about a story, even about what it means. (113)

Still, as Appleyard points out, the upper-secondary student’s “personalist approach” often clashes with the more “academic approach” of teachers (115) – even though teachers too may tend towards the personalist angle. Given the fairly poor “academic” interpretive abilities of high school students in the research available to Appleyard, he thus asks: “Is it possible that personalist teachers have too low an estimate of students’ analytic abilities and academic teachers have too high an expectation of what they can do? And that what is missing in between is the kind of response that ought to be most suited to high school students’ way of thinking: a critical evaluation of what the work of literature seems to say about the world?” (115).¹⁹ In other words, “if we make students proceed directly from this way [the personalist] of responding to a story to academic talk of literary devices, symbols, genres, ambiguity, point of view, and so forth, then we risk passing over the adolescent’s critical involvement with the whole world of meaning and significance” (116). Indeed, Appleyard suggests that maybe we should to some degree heed the caution of D.W. Harding “that in teaching adolescents and even university undergraduates, ‘It is literature, not literary criticism, that is

¹⁹ One might wonder, though, whether the ability of students indicated by the empirical studies here is a fixed quality determined by psychological development, or an at least partly plastic quality determined by the exact nature of their previous education, which could be subject to revision and reform whereas the general nature of psychological development could not.

the subject” (116). He thus strikes a middle-way between the “personalist” and the “academic” approach that on the evidence seems highly valuable for Swedish upper-secondary English teachers’ negotiation between their academic training and, on the one hand, their students’ zones of proximal development, and on the other hand, the “form and content” aspect of the syllabus for English. The next question is of course exactly what this would entail in practice.

As can be seen from the above, though, there is a lack of consensus in “the literature” on the issue of teaching literary form to adolescents in an ESL setting: Harmer barely touches on it; Ur, McKay, Langer and Appleyard do so but urge us not to get too involved in literary analysis; Maley and Lazar more unreservedly point to the value of studying literature for its literary qualities; whereas Lundahl chiefly comes across as promoting the study of form due to its being a curricular requirement. Moreover, all these authors view literary form/literary qualities, as well as the desired learning outcomes of studying these, in different terms. It is easy to see that, if we pair this fact with the vagueness of the syllabus for English 5 and 6, we have a recipe for various degrees of shortcoming in the Swedish upper-secondary English classroom. In what follows, we will see whether there is empirical evidence of such shortcoming.

2. Results

In this section, I present the findings of the questionnaire survey. Comments are here kept to a minimum – analysis and discussion are reserved for the subsequent section of this study, with the comments here indicating what I have found to be the most significant aspects of the results. The answers to the teacher questionnaires are presented in detail, while more of a general summary is made of the answers to the student questionnaires.

Results of teacher questionnaires²⁰

Question 1: How do you understand the concept of “form” here as pertains to literature?

T1: Different genres, horror, drama, love, dystopia. Different types; poetry, plays.

T2: Both structure and genre.

T3: Perspective, narrator, chronology, genre/text type, language/style, metre, rhyme schemes etc.

T4: The way the book is written, the stylistic features used by the author, genre, language, structure etc.

T5: Important aspects of a certain genre, symbolism, themes, motifs. But different people would count different aspects as “form”.

T6: I would interpret it almost the same as “genre”, meaning that we can read literature in different “forms” such as fiction and non-fiction (an overall distinction) but also in different “forms” such as short stories, diaries, autobiographies etc. Of course, you could also see the narration as part of the form, but my experience tells me that this is difficult for the pupils.

²⁰ The respective teachers are referred to throughout as T1, T2, T3, etc.

T7: Form as pertains to text types or genre? Terminology is unclear and results in (too much) individual interpretation. Form defined as content that “fits” the specifications and conventions of a text type. An example would be how the form of a graphic novel is based squarely on the conventions of an illustrated text.

We can see that the common thread in the answers above is “genre”, whereas only three informants (T3, T4, T5) explicitly or implicitly bring up stylistic features, and only two (T2, T3) clearly mention structural elements. Thus, while “genre” indeed implies certain stylistic and structural features, a minority of teachers seem to consider either feature with any immediacy. Notably, one teacher (T6) seems somewhat hesitant to consider *literary* form specifically. Significantly, though, no teacher sees form here as concerning strictly linguistic or rhetorical elements the student might add to their inventory of communicative tools. Notably, T5 and T7 problematize the issue (T7 even making a distinction between text types and genres not seen elsewhere among the informants), which indicates they share the misgivings about the syllabus I have myself given voice to in this study.

Question 2: When literary form is a designated part of an English course you teach, how do you usually go about teaching it?

T1: Describing typical features for the particular form. → Making the students find examples from the works that show this form.

T2: Discuss from different types of texts.

T3: I usually include issues pertaining to form when preparing questions for the literature studied in my courses. The students are required to think about form as well as content when reading the texts, which makes form a natural part of the study of literature. If students are unfamiliar with certain literary terms, we go through them in class – either before the students start reading or while they are working with the text.

I find it useful to let students compare different texts when it comes to form.

Therefore, I try to use similar questions for all the texts studied within the same course.

T4: I try to integrate/intertwine content and form into a united whole; try to discuss what stylistic methods/form the author has chosen and why; or rather, try to make the students realize and understand what is characteristic of literary form in general which should be applied to a specific piece of work.

T5: Everything starts with reading. Discussion on aspects regarding form depends on novel.

T6: I talk about form when I teach the skills of writing. In these “mini courses”, I talk about a text consisting of three parts; language, content and form; and that every part is important for a text on a high level. About form, I focus on paragraphing, headings, introduction, ending, conclusion and such things. Sometimes I try to talk about the narration, but it’s hard...

T7: Layout. Drama: script, TV script, dialogue. Novel: narrative devices. Poetry: poetic devices – imagery and structure. Do layout + conventions define form?

Here, it is clear that most teachers consider a focus on specific texts important – form should not be taught in isolation, as mere abstract concepts for later application (T1, though, might seem to steer closer to such an approach). Both T3 and T4, in their respective ways, give voice to the value of variation/comparison as a prism of learning.²¹ Again, T6 expresses wariness of “talk about narration”, and also seems more intent on teaching *writing* skills (composition) than literary analysis skills; and again, T7 does not simply answer, but also waxes reflective/questioning.

²¹ For the centrality of variation to successful learning, see, for instance, Mun Ling Lo, as well as Ference Marton and Shirley Booth.

Question 3: How do you go about assessing student learning when it comes to literary form?

T1: Usually through oral or written discussion. Since not a knowledge requirement I usually don't grade it on its own, more as part of discussing content/details.

T2: Hard to say! They practise different types both in reading and writing.

T3: I assess student learning when it comes to literary analysis (form and content) through seminars on a couple of different occasions while the students are working on the texts. I usually divide longer texts into two or three different parts and hold a seminar after each part. The grading assessment takes place in the form of an oral discussion (in small groups) or a written assignment. Both form, content and the connection between the two are dealt with in the exam.

T4: For example, in a literary, written analysis where form is one aspect to discuss.

T5: Being able to take part in a literary discussion. But there is not much focus on this in the grading criteria.

T6: If I want to assess student learning about genres, which I normally don't, I have to ask them questions about differences and similarities in different genres. If assessing texts, I focus my comments also on form. This is done very often in my courses.

T7: Student survey of genres. Definitions of conventions that accompany text types. Knowledge of evolution of genres/forms. Knowledge of literary forms. Ability to recognise the aesthetic qualities of literature.

Here, the common thread is that there is not much of a common thread – assessment models differ quite clearly: oral or written, seminars and written assignments, written analysis, discussion, or even “hard to say”; moreover, T7's response seems to concern the “what” rather than the “how” of assessment. Only T3 comes across as having a well-formed practical theory in this context. What is perhaps most significant, though, is that both T1 and T5

emphasize the lack of clear alignment between central content and grading criteria in this regard – T1, however, understands literary form as falling under the criteria of “discussing content/details”. Similarly, T6 tends towards leaving the matter out entirely, claiming to “normally” not “assess student learning about genres”.

Question 4: How do you envisage the relation between form and content? In what ways is an attention to form relevant to discussions of content?

T1: [no answer]

T2: [no answer]

T3: I believe it is important to study form and content simultaneously, since they are interconnected. A discussion about content without paying attention to form would be impossible as form determines content (and vice versa). For example, a literary text is always bound by the conventions of its genre, and narrative point-of-view strongly affects how we perceive a story. This perspective is important to convey to our students.

T4: An author has usually chosen a form to emphasize the content or vice versa. Form and content are inseparable and make up a united whole and that is why one, in general, should try to make the students pay attention to form.

T5: Form is more important in certain novels. Or depending on the novel it is more or less important to focus on form, and, depending on the novel, what aspects of form.

T6: “Without a clear content, the text is not a good one even though you know how to organize, or structure it” “It does not matter/it does not help you if the content is clear when the form makes it hard for me to read it...”²²

²² Quotation marks are the informant’s.

T7: Narrative form/conventions vital to development of content; likewise dramatic/poetic form. Change of content may result in change of form. New structure of a poem may revolutionise layout/form in future.

Probably the most noteworthy point here is that T1 and T2 decline to answer the question, whether this be a sign of gaps in their practical theory or simply of stress. Both T3 and T4 stress that form and content are “interconnected” or even “inseparable”. T5 relativizes the importance of form in terms of the specificity of each literary text. Here too, T6 seems to take the question to concern communicative competence as pertains to the productive skills.

Question 5: In your experience, how do students react to formal analysis of literature?

T1: In general they find it hard with all types of analysis. Knowing about Shakespeare’s life, the Renaissance and Romeo & Juliet separately is OK for most students, putting this together is hard. Making connections, conclusions is hard.

T2: They find it difficult, but if they are given enough time they also find it useful.

T3: In my experience, students react well to formal analysis of literature. It often helps them to understand the text better, and sometimes it even enhances the reading experience to be able to think about how a text is constructed. I have had students telling me that learning about things like narrative perspective and chronology made them able to read literature in a completely different way than before.

T4: If you explain why form is important and why form is an integrated part of a book, they usually react positively. However, usually they have no choice; form is something that should be discussed whether they like it or not.

T5: Many enjoy reading – but not very eager to discuss/do analyses.

T6: As I said earlier, they think this is hard. I think that we will have to wait until English 6 with this...

T7: Happily.

Here, only two informants (T3 and T7) give a clearly positive view, although T2's and T4's experiences tends towards the positive as well. The other four informants instead use phrases such as "hard", "difficult", and "not very eager". T1's answer does not seem to concern formal analysis as such. T6 seems close to suggesting rebellion against the syllabus, in their notion that formal analysis should wait until English 6.

Results of student questionnaires²³

Question 1: How do you interpret the concept of "form" here? What do you believe/consider to be meant by the "form" of a literary text?

Here, many students quite expectedly express uncertainty about the concept – phrases such as "uncertain", "I think", "maybe", "I presume", "no idea" and "don't know" abound, as well as question marks at the ends of statements. Out of 46 student answers, 16 contain variations on such phrases, but only 2 out of those simply answer "I don't know" without hazarding any sort of guess. Interestingly, one student writes that "[w]e have often heard this concept in various subjects but never got to hear from the teacher what it's actually supposed to mean". Moving to the more positive results, just as was the case with the teachers, by far the most common answer to question one is that "form" concerns types of literature, that is, genres. This notion is expressed through phrases such as "texts written in different ways", "different types of literature", "what type of text", "different styles/genres". 28 out of 46 student answers present variants on this view. Yet, there is also generally an explicit focus on form in the sense of the structural aspects of texts: "How it is structured", "The structure in the text", "How the text is constructed", "how the structure looks", "the design". 23 out of 46 student

²³ The students' answers have been translated from Swedish to English with the goal of attaining clarity whilst remaining as true as possible to the original phrasing (including solecisms).

answers present this notion in one way or another. The remaining notions of form fall into the categories of “style” (5 students), or more specifically “stylistic devices” (3 students), and finally “narrative perspective” (1 student).

Question 2: According to what you remember, was literary form brought up/discussed when you took English 5 and 6? [Yes/No boxes] If “Yes”, try to describe what was brought up/discussed and how.

Significantly, here a majority give a negative answer to the Yes/No-question. 25 out of 46 students, or 54%, cannot remember literary form having been brought up, which indicates that the understanding of literary form they voice in their responses to question one derives largely from their Swedish classes.

Question 2	Number of students	In %
Yes	21	46
No	25	54
Total	46	100

When it comes to the question of what was brought up and how, answers vary greatly. In the case of the “what”, answers generally fall into four main categories in terms of what they focus on: differences between genres, structure and style, components/building blocks, and narrative perspective; a fifth category would be answers that are vague or not concerned with literary form in any received sense of the term (e.g., “Theater?”, “It was brought up how one should structure a text”, “what is important to include [in a text]”, “Books”). In the case of the “how”, most answers are not more specific than “we discussed” or “we looked at”. The following samples are representative of the variety of the full responses: “The teacher asked simple questions about from what perspective the text was narrated and what language it was

written in when we got as a task to give an account of what we had read”; “Very little about form was brought up is what I think, we talked about different types of texts and got to read and write about one specific type”; “We got to analyze poems and books and then discussed their structure and style”; “We got to write texts that referred to the different forms, and also discuss the differences between the different forms”; “We looked at differences between novels and short stories and how they convey their message in different ways. When we read poems we also looked at different ways of constructing them, that there are different sub-forms of the poem form”; “We have discussed the structure of different types of literature. Different genres have also been discussed”. One student claims that “[i]n English 5 we read our own books so literature wasn’t brought up there”, which is particularly interesting, as it is yet an indication of a failure in the realization of the syllabus and thus in educational equivalency. Notable is also the comment of a student who gave a negative answer to the Yes/No-question: “Not that I remember, it has however been a big part of the Swedish courses” – this lends further support to the hypothesis that students’ understanding of literary form to a great extent comes from their Swedish classes.

Question 3: According to what you remember, did you carry out formal analyses of literary texts as part of the assessment (tests/assignments) in English 5 and/or 6? [Boxes for “Yes, orally”, “Yes, in writing”, “Yes, orally and in writing”, and “No”]

Curiously, the number of students who gave a positive answer to this question is significantly greater than that for the question about whether form had been covered at all in the English courses (question two). It might be the case that students’ memories were differently triggered by this question, but it is still remarkable that 41% (see the below table) either did not touch upon form in English 5 and 6, or have no learning retention.

Question 3	Number of students	In %
Yes – orally	4	9
Yes – in writing	8	17
Yes – both	15	33
Yes (total)	27	59
No	19	41
Total	46	100

Question 4: In what ways might it be important/useful to learn about formal aspects of literary texts?

Here, only 6 out of 46 students are unable to answer. Given that they are not misinterpreting the questions, the remaining students mainly see the usefulness in terms of the connection between studying literary form and the development of their own linguistic repertoire for use not exclusively in strictly literary contexts, that is, in their own written production: “So one will be able to construct one’s own texts then and to adapt the style of the text to the purpose”; “It can change people’s way of expressing themselves”; “To understand when you should use the different form on different occasions”; “Maybe in some way one can make use of it in one’s own writing”; “To be able to express oneself to a broader audience”; “You learn which forms are the most effective in divers genres and can use this in future school-work”; “So that one has different ways of writing to choose from”; etc. Still, some students give voice to the notion of a more “intraliterary” usefulness, even though they may struggle to express this notion clearly: “One reads and analyses different literary texts in various subjects and in one’s everyday life so that it is always good to know what one is reading, etc.”; “The way I have interpreted ‘form’ it can be important to learn different depictions in literature, how they are constructed. In that way one can read different sorts of literature from different perspectives”;

“Maybe to learn about the construction and development of language and literature. In order to be able to interpret and analyze texts. Understand the language more maybe”; “So that one has read/processed different types of texts and more easily can understand them and their purpose”; “One is able to quickly know what genre and themes different literary works have”; “ ... it may also be good to learn about this to be able to analyze books in a greater and deeper spectrum”; “In order to understand the content of literature and its significance to our contemporary world”. One student rather neatly combines the two notions of usefulness: “1. To be able to express oneself more effectively. 2. To get a greater understanding of literary texts”. Another student, somewhat surprisingly, not only problematizes the issue, but also in effect summarizes my thesis: “The students should absolutely have a grasp of what they should do and understand what they do 100%. In this context it is not like that since form surely may be interpreted in many ways”.

With that in mind, let us move on to a more proper analysis of the above results.

3. Analysis and discussion

In the most general terms, the results of both questionnaires laid side-by-side may be summarily analyzed as follows: While the students express more uncertainty about what “form” should be taken to mean, they largely concur with the teachers that above all it means genre and structure. However, whereas the teachers generally do not assume formal analysis to primarily concern linguistic/rhetorical elements to be assimilated for use in students’ own production, the students to a very large extent do, although a few of them view the value of such analysis in “intraliterary” rather than “extraliterary” terms; significantly, though, whereas most teachers tend towards a negative impression of students’ attitude to formal analysis, very few students are unable to attach any value to such analysis. Perhaps most crucially, however, while all but one teacher clearly profess to teach literary form, at least a large minority of the students claim not to remember any such teaching.

Answering the primary questions posed in this study, however, requires a more detailed analysis. Those questions concerned, first, whether “form” is taught at all, second, how it is taught (that is, in accordance with what understanding and what method(s)), and third, what impact that teaching seems to have on student learning (that is, whether students have come to any understanding of literary form, what the nature of that understanding is, and what their conception of the usefulness of understanding form is). Ultimately, though, there is a fourth question, concerning what the answers to the first three questions imply about the nature of the syllabus and about the realization of the syllabus.

The first question may be answered as follows: Yes, literary form is taught – but the question is whether it is so to varying degrees, and also what the exact nature of the learning outcomes are, given that so many students cannot recall any such teaching. It should also be noted in conjunction with this that one teacher does seem somewhat reluctant to consider

literary form specifically, expressing wariness of things such as “talk about narration” and suggesting that formal analysis should wait until English 6, and seems focused on teaching writing skills rather than literary analysis skills. Of course, this might be a useful didactic tactic for teaching literary form as well, but there is nothing in this teacher’s response that indicates that the work on formal aspects of written production leads into work on formal aspects of literary texts, or vice versa. Be that as it may, the crucial point here is that if the lack of shared vision and tendency to reluctance indicated by these results is shared to any degree among teachers nationally, then there will be shortcomings in syllabus realization (although the exact nature of these shortcomings depends on what the intentions underlying the syllabus actually are) and educational equivalency (notable in this context is also the student who claims that “[i]n English 5 we read our own books so literature wasn’t brought up there”).²⁴

As for the second question, the findings show that form is taught largely in terms of genre as a primary principle. As noted in the previous section, the teachers that took part in the survey most commonly understand form in this sense, with but a few singling out stylistic or structural elements as well. Thus, as I noted above, while “genre” indeed implies certain stylistic and structural features, a minority of teachers profess a practical theory that considers either feature with any immediacy. This view is however somewhat qualified by the student answers, which, although they most commonly state that genre (and differences between genres) was what was brought up, also quite commonly report teaching on structure and style, and/or components/building blocks.

At any rate, importantly form seems to be taught largely not in terms of genre pedagogy with an eye on productive skills, but rather focusing on receptive skills (that is, fostering a

²⁴ Of course, that students, according to several of the teachers, seem to find formal analysis “hard” or “difficult”, or are “not very eager” to do it, might partly account for a reluctance to teach literary form on the part of teachers.

deeper ability to appreciate literary texts). No teacher sees form in the terms of strictly linguistic or rhetorical elements for the student to add to their communicative toolbox. Thus, they quite clearly break with the long-dominant language-acquisition bent of literary studies in EFL/ESL, which we saw exemplified above primarily by Ur and McKay, but also by Lazar and, ultimately, Maley (who refers to it as “the language model” (182)).

We are thus also able to address the issue broached in the introduction, of whether upper-secondary English in Sweden is to be taken simply as a language-acquisition subject, or taken to lie closer to Swedish as a subject, which would mean not simply working on acquiring the language, but on performing ever-more-complex cognitive tasks in the language – in effect, whether literary form should be restricted to more linguistic or rhetorical features, or should take in the whole battery of formal aspects of literature. Although one cannot deduce much about the underlying intentions of the policy documents in this regard, it would seem that the latter is in teacherly practice generally the case given the results of the questionnaires.

In their teaching practice, most teachers also consider a focus on specific texts important, indicating a wariness of teaching form in isolation, as mere abstract concepts for later application. They thus seem to more or less concur with Langer’s model of literary teaching, where “literary concepts become an integral part of how the students think about and express ideas” in discussions of literary works (143), as well as with Appleyard’s caution, via D.W. Harding, “that in teaching adolescents ... ‘It is literature, not literary criticism, that is the subject’” (116).

Related to this aspect of teaching practice is also the issue of the relation between form and content, where the most noteworthy point is that two teachers decline to answer the question, which may be seen as a sign of gaps in their practical theory. Notable is also that only two of the remaining teachers elaborate on the notion that form and content are

“interconnected” or even “inseparable” and how this insight influences their teaching and assessment practices. These findings indicate that the relation between form and content is a relatively neglected aspect of teachers’ practical theories, which if it is the case will adversely affect deep pedagogical alignment and holistic learning.

Another aspect of teaching and learning, and a crucial one, is indeed assessment, whether it be formative or summative. It is also in the case of assessment that the issue of alignment comes to the fore, as assessment constitutes the ultimate point in the chain of alignment, from curriculum via course plans via lesson plans via teaching. One answer to the question on teachers’ assessment – “But there is not much focus on this in the grading criteria” – does support my contention that the realization of the syllabus risks failing in terms of both alignment and educational equivalency, since there will be an expected myopia on the part of some (most?) teachers by which the grading criteria are disconnected from the central content and the stated aims of the subject. Another teacher seems to maintain that connection to a greater extent, in their reasoning that “[s]ince not a knowledge requirement I usually don’t grade it on its own, more as *part of discussing content/details*” (my emphasis). Yet another teacher, though, tends towards leaving the matter out entirely, claiming to “normally” not “assess student learning about genres”. Of course, such practice raises the question of why one would bring something up in one’s teaching if it is not going to be part of the assessment in any way (that is, the very fallacy that awareness of the principle of alignment is meant to preclude). The inverse of that question is raised by the fact that many students who could not recall teaching on form still claimed to have been assessed on it. It seems equally odd that one should be asked to perform formal analyses as part of the assessment of one’s learning without having been provided with an opportunity to learn about form. There are two possible interpretations of the nature of the data in this respect: either form was indeed not “taught”, but only “tested”, or students’ memories were differently triggered by this question. If the

latter is the case, the situation is not quite as bleak as suggested by the answers to question two, but it is still remarkable that a significant minority (41%) either did not touch upon form in English 5 and 6, or have no learning retention.

This final point brings us to the third question, concerning what impact the teaching has on students, where it is also highly significant that so many students seem to have no learning retention (given that form was indeed taught to them), and several seem to rely on Swedish as a subject rather than English for their understanding of literary form. Depending on how one interprets the data, a majority of students or a significant minority cannot remember literary form having been brought up in English, which lends support to the hypothesis that the understanding of literary form they do voice derives largely from their Swedish classes (notable here is the following comment by a student: “Not that I remember, it has however been a big part of the Swedish courses”). More importantly, it indicates that there are problems with syllabus realization and educational equivalency. One may argue that perhaps to a great extent it indicates problems with learning retention on the part of students – but this would hardly be a better situation, as it would still signify a failure in successful deep pedagogical alignment, and not simply on the part of students, whose sole responsibility learning retention is not.

Moreover, it is interesting to see that, as opposed to the general view of the teachers, students above all seem to highlight the connection between studying literary form and the development of their own linguistic repertoire for use not exclusively in strictly literary contexts. Their notions of the usefulness of understanding literary form are largely restricted to this “extraliterarily” instrumental view – that is, understanding form is useful for one’s own ability to produce different texts, but not for one’s ability to better appreciate literature itself. Still, some students do give voice to the notion of a more “intraliterary” usefulness, with one student rather neatly combining the two notions of usefulness. Most interesting, though, is the

answer of the student who not only problematizes the issue, but also at least partly summarizes my thesis: “The students should absolutely have a grasp of what they should do and understand what they do 100%. In this context it is not like that since form surely may be interpreted in many ways”. Even one student put in a situation where they give such an answer is indicative of a failure in terms of deep pedagogical alignment, of syllabus realization, and of educational equivalency.

We are thus homing in on the fourth question, regarding what the answers to the first three questions imply about the nature of the syllabus and about the realization of the syllabus. Taken as a whole, the results of the questionnaires show that the vagueness of the syllabus results in a lack of shared vision among teachers, which together with factors such as gaps in teachers’ practical theories (a factor that a less vague syllabus could influence positively) very probably adversely affects course and programme alignment as well as educational equivalency between classes, programmes, and schools (as discrepancies in the reported practical theory among the pedagogical staff even at an intraschool level would surely indicate discrepancies at an interschool, and thus at a national, level).

4. Conclusion

We may conclude from the results, then, that while literary form does seem to be taught in upper-secondary English, it seems to be so to varying degrees, with varying underlying conceptualizations, with varying principles of assessment, and with varying learning outcomes. Thus, the results also indicate that the vagueness of the syllabus results in a lack of shared vision among teachers, which together with factors such as gaps in teachers' practical theories very probably adversely affects course and programme alignment as well as educational equivalency between classes, programmes, and schools.

It is highly significant that two teachers qualify their answers regarding what is meant by "form" by expressing worries about the vagueness or contestedness of the term "form", thus indicating the same misgivings about the transparency of the syllabus that are my main concern in this study. Given the nature of the (un-)stated policy, the remedy to this situation will have to lie in teachers' collectively negotiating a joint policy. One extension of my study that I had in mind, but have not been able to implement within the boundaries of this project, is indeed a discussion of avenues of progress in this regard.

I will offer one small part of that discussion here, though, to indicate what questions ought to come into play in it: Interestingly, the teachers on the whole seem to promote the value of literary analysis as a receptive skill, whereas the students largely seem to understand the value of such analysis in terms of a furthering of their own productive skills. This is a division that, *mutatis mutandis*, gels with Appleyard's distinction between the "academic" (and thus more teacher-typical) and the "personalist" (and thus more student-typical) approach. I must confess to siding with the teachers here, due to my professional training as well as my convictions about the ultimate goals of a broad upper-secondary education. Yet, how do we gauge which is the more proper approach? If we look at the subject plan for upper-

secondary English, there is in fact much that points in the direction of an underlying intention that form be studied in terms of rhetoric and stylistics with the goal of improving productive skills. Given that we accord any degree of significance to official policy – and as teachers and thus civil servants, it would be a grave matter if we did not – this fact must surely influence our collegial deliberations. At any rate, though, we may conclude from this that the indeterminability of the syllabus (particularly when paired with the disparate general discourse on literary form and the teaching of it within the confines of upper-secondary English) is the very kernel of the problem here.

5. Works cited

- Apple, Michael W. "Controlling the Work of Teachers". *The Curriculum Studies Reader*. Eds. David J. Flinders and Stephen J. Thornton. Second ed. New York: RoutledgeFalmer, 2004. 183-97. Print.
- Appleyard, J.A. *Becoming a Reader: The Experience of Fiction from Childhood to Adulthood*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1991. Print.
- Biggs, John, and Catherine Tang. *Teaching for Quality Learning at University*. Fourth ed. Maidenhead: Open UP, 2011. Print.
- Cuddon, J.A. *The Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory*. Fourth ed. Rev. C.E. Preston. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1999. Print.
- Freidson, Eliot. *Professionalism: The Third Logic*. Cambridge: Polity, 2001. Print.
- Griffith, Kelley. *Writing Essay about Literature: A Guide and Style Sheet*. Fourth ed. Fort Worth: Harcourt, 1994. Print.
- Harmer, Jeremy. *The Practice of English Language Teaching*. Fourth ed. Harlow: Pearson, 2007. Print.
- Hirsch, Jr., E.D., and John Holdren. "Core Knowledge: Building Knowledge Year By Year, or 'Why Should I Teach Ancient Egypt to a First Grader?'"'. *Books to Build On: A Grade-By-Grade Resource Book for Parents and Teachers*. Eds. John Holdren and E.D. Hirsch, Jr. New York: Dell, 1996. 9-23. Print.
- Kaufman, Roger, and Fenwick W. English. *Needs Assessment: Concept and Application*. Englewood Cliffs: Educational Technology, 1979. Print.
- Langer, Judith A. *Envisioning Literature: Literary Understanding and Literary Instruction*. Second ed. New York: Teachers College, 2011. Print.

- Lazar, Gillian. *Literature and Language Teaching: A Guide for Teachers and Trainers*.
Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1999. Print.
- Lo, Mun Ling. *Variation Theory and the Improvement of Teaching and Learning*.
Gothenburg: Acta Universitatis Gothoburgensis, 2012. Print.
- Lundahl, Bo. *Engelsk Språkdiraktik: Texter, Kommunikation, Språkutveckling*. Second ed.
Lund: Studentlitteratur, 2012. Print.
- Maley, Alan. "Literature In the Language Classroom". *The Cambridge Guide to Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages*. Ed. Carter, Ronald and David Nunan.
Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2001. 180-85. Print.
- Marton, Ference, and Shirley Booth. *Learning and Awareness*. Mahwah: Erlbaum, 1997.
Print.
- McKay, Sandra Lee. "Literature as Content for ESL/EFL". *Teaching English as a Second or Foreign Language*. Ed. Marianne Celce-Murcia. Third ed. Boston: Heinle. 319-32. Print.
- Patel, Runa and Bo Davidson. *Forskningsmetodikens Grunder: Att Planera, Genomföra och Rapportera en Undersökning*, Lund: Studentlitteratur, 1991. Print.
- Sanzo, Karen L., Steve Myran, and John Caggiano. *Formative Assessment Leadership: Identify, Plan, Apply, Assess, Refine*. New York: Routledge, 2015. Print.
- Selden, Raman, ed. *The Theory of Criticism: From Plato to the Present*. New York: Longman, 1988. Print.
- Skolverket. "Alla kommentarer". *The Swedish National Agency for Education*. PDF file.
Web. 26 Sep 2014.
- . "English 120912". *The Swedish National Agency for Education*. PDF file. Web.
26 Sep 2014.
- Ur, Penny. *A Course in English Language Teaching*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2012. Print.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Teacher questionnaire

This questionnaire is part of a study carried out as part of an MA thesis at Linnaeus University, course 14HT-GO1304/4EN01E/5EN01E-Examensarbete-S/GY-Distans, supervised by Prof. Maria Olaussen. Your participation is greatly appreciated. Put wholly or partially completed questionnaires in my pigeonhole by **December 8**.

Background: Study of literary form is posited as part of the “central content” in the “subject plans” for English step 5 and 6 – for step 5, “content and form in different kinds of fiction”; for step 6, “form and content in film and literature” (Skolverket, “English 120912” 3, 7).

1. How do you understand the concept of “form” here, as pertains to literature?

2. When literary form is a designated part of an English course you teach, how do you usually go about teaching it?

3. How do you go about assessing student learning when it comes to literary form?

Appendix 2: Student questionnaire

This questionnaire is part of a study carried out as part of an MA thesis at Linnaeus University, course 14HT-GO1304/4EN01E/5EN01E-Examensarbete–S/GY-Distans, supervised by Prof. Maria Olaussen. Your participation is greatly appreciated.

Bakgrund: Studiet av skönlitteraturens formmässiga aspekter anges som en del av det “centrala innehållet” i ämnesplanerna för steg 5 och 6 i gymnasieskolans engelska – för steg 5, ”innehåll och form i olika typer av fiktion”; för steg 6, ”form och innehåll i film och litteratur”. Nedan följer ett antal frågor i relation till detta – de rör alltså *Engelska 5 och 6* (inte Engelska 7), och de rör litterära texter, dvs. romaner, noveller, dikter, drama.

1. Hur tolkar du begreppet “form” här? Vad tror/anser du menas med en litterär texts ”form”?

2. Enligt vad du minns, togs litterär form upp/diskuterades när du läste Engelska 5 och 6?

Ja Nej

Om ”Ja”, försök beskriva hur/vad som togs upp/diskuterades:

3. Enligt vad du minns, genomförde du formmässiga analyser av litterära texter som en del av examinationen (prov/inlämningsuppgifter) i Engelska 5 och/eller 6?

Ja, muntligt

Ja, skriftligt

Ja, muntligt och skriftligt

Nej

4. På vilka sätt kan det vara viktigt/nyttigt att lära sig om formmässiga aspekter av litterära texter?
