

Information and Experience: Audiovisual Observations of Reading Activities in Swedish Comprehensive School Classrooms 1967–1969

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This study investigates reading activities in Swedish primary school classrooms during the late 1960s. Sound and video recordings of 223 Swedish lessons held between 1967 and 1969 are used to analyse the activity of reading as taught and performed. The results indicate that the practice of informational reading, often based on finding predetermined, explicit ‘facts’ in textbooks through individual, silent reading, was common. The practice of experiential reading, based on fiction, imagination and the joy of reading, was not only less common, but also often compromised by instrumental concerns. In the national curriculum of the time, the practice of informational reading was related to study skills and was intended to prepare all pupils for higher level education. While often appearing overproportioned, superficial and fragmented, these reading practices were still intentional objects of learning and teaching, and were grounded in the democratic and egalitarian ideals of Swedish post-war educational policy.

Keywords: reading, Swedish comprehensive school, egalitarianism, democratisation, audiovisual analysis

Introduction

In his well-known article from 1986, *First Steps Toward a History of Reading*, Robert Darnton observed that the ‘interpretive schemes’ used in any reading activity ‘belong to cultural configurations, which have varied enormously over time’.² Since then, a growing body of research has explored historical relations between the practice of reading and its social and cultural conditions. Both empirically and conceptually, much

² Darnton, ‘First Steps Toward a History of Reading’, *Australian Journal of French Studies* 51, no. 2/3 (2014): 175. Originally published in AJFS 23, no. 1(1986).

of this work is linked to education and educational institutions.³ Thus, many of the discourses and ideologies of reading during the last centuries have been laid bare through research on sources such as curricula, teaching manuals, policy documents, primers and textbooks.⁴

Reading and reading instruction were parts of the processes forming modern nations and societies during the last century. For example, Bill Green and Phillip Cormack have pointed out how the teaching of reading in early twentieth century Australia was closely related to ideas of moral development, citizenship and national identity.⁵ Similar findings exist in Swedish research on the period around 1900.⁶ Pertaining to the post war period, it has been suggested that the representation of reading in the Swedish curricula of the 1960s, was framed by the interplay between

³ For a general argument, see Jonathan Rose, ‘The History of Education as the History of Reading’, *History of Education* 35, no. 4–5 (2007): 595–605.

⁴ Much of the work pertaining to English is treated in Annette Joyce Patterson, Philip Anton Cormack and William Charles Green, ‘The Child, the Text and the Teacher: Reading Primers and Reading Instruction’, *Paedagogica Historica* 48, no. 2 (2012): 185–196.

⁵ Green and Cormack, ‘Literacy, Nation, Schooling: Reading (in) Australia’, in *Schooling and the Making of Citizens in the Long Nineteenth Century: Comparative Visions*, ed. Daniel Tröhler, Thomas S. Popkewitz and David F. Labaree (London: Routledge, 2011), 240–261.

⁶ Lars Furuland, *Ljus över landet och andra litteratursociologiska uppsatser* [Light over the land and other essays in the sociology of literature] (Hedemora: Gidlund, 1991); Åke Isling, *Kampen för och emot en demokratisk skola, 2: Det pedagogiska arvet* [The struggle for and against a democratic school system, 2: The pedagogic legacy] (Stockholm: Sober, 1988).

democratic progressivism and the disciplinary culture of the school system.⁷ Through this type of research it is possible to understand different traditions and schemata of reading simultaneously as products of, and building blocks in, social and political projects aiming to build modern societies and to mould the kind of citizens these societies are in need of.

Research on the level of discourse and ideology, however, does leave several questions unanswered, for example, how reading was enacted and experienced as a performed activity, and whether the high ideals of reading expressed in various normative documents were actually realised in practice. This is a version of a constitutive problem for the research field of the history of reading aiming to uncover the activities and experiences of past readers. Historians of reading, such as Jonathan Rose, have repeatedly stressed that reading as activity and experience cannot be determined, predicted or inferred from the texts that were read or the normative texts prescribing how reading should be organised.⁸ Investigating such issues has required

⁷ Mats Dolatkhah and Anna Hampson Lundh, ‘Reading, Democracy and Discipline: Premises for Reading Activities in Swedish Primary Schools from 1967–1969’, in *Reading in Changing Society*, eds. Marju Lauristin and Peeter Vihalemm (Tartu: Tartu University Press, 2014), 144–157. See also Jonas U. D. Qvarsebo, ‘Swedish Progressive School Politics and the Disciplinary Regime of the School, 1946–1962: A Genealogical Perspective’, *Paedagogica Historica* 49, no. 2 (2013): 217–235. doi: 10.1080/00309230.2012.725841

⁸ Rose, ‘History of Education as the History of Reading’: 595; Rose, ‘Rereading the English Common Reader: A Preface to the History of Audiences’, *Journal of the History of Ideas* 53, no. 1 (1992): 47–70.

considerable methodological development within the history of reading.⁹ Using sources such as oral history interviews, letters, autobiographies and library records, researchers have closed in on the practices of ‘the common reader’ in different historical situations.¹⁰

The aim of the present article is twofold. One is to analyse the relations between reading, school and society in Sweden during the 1960s. Sweden, during this period, is seen as a case of a developed, industrialised, and democratic welfare state, before the age of digital reading technologies. The institution of schooling is fundamental to modern reading culture, and, as Christine Pawley suggests, institutions such as schools are important focal points for the history of reading, as they constitute intersections

⁹ See Rosalind Crone and Shafquat Towheed, eds., *The History of Reading, Volume 3: Methods, Strategies, Tactics* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2011) and Christine Pawley, ‘Retrieving Readers: Library Experiences’, *Library Quarterly* 76, no. 4 (2006): 379–387. doi: 10.1086/511761

¹⁰ For the use of oral history interviews, see e. g. Martyn Lyons and Lucy Taksa, *Australian Readers Remember: An Oral History of Reading 1890–1930* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1992) and Mats Dolatkhah, ‘The Rules of Reading: Examples of Reading and Library Use in Early Twentieth-Century Swedish Families’, *Library History* 24, no.3 (2008): 220–229.. Letters to the author are discussed by Jenny Bergenmar and Maria Karlsson, ‘The Reader in History and Letters to the Author: The Case of Selma Lagerlöf and her Audience’, in *Re-Mapping Lagerlöf: Performance, Intermediality, and European Transmissions*, eds. Helena Forsås-Scott, Lisbeth Stenberg and Bjarne Thorup Thomsen (Lund: Nordic Academic Press, 2014), 44–59. Jonathan Rose used autobiographies in *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes* (London: Yale University Press, 2001) and Christine Pawley made use of library records in *Reading on the Middle Border: The Culture of Print in Late Nineteenth-Century Osage, Iowa* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2001).

between wider societal macro-conditions and the micro-level where individual readers live their everyday lives.¹¹ This was certainly the case of the Swedish comprehensive school, which was established in 1962. As a societal institution, it was motivated by political concerns at a specific historical point in time, and commissioned to strive towards certain societal goals such as democratisation and equal educational opportunities for all children. The setting thus provides opportunities for understanding the activity of reading as underpinned by political and social traditions, assumptions and rationales in a modern project of building a society.

A second aim is to contribute to the methodology of the history of reading, through exploring a collection of audiovisual recordings of Swedish classroom activities from 1967–1969, originally compiled in a research project led by Karl-Gustaf Stukát at University of Gothenburg: *Didaktisk processanalys* (Didactic process analysis, in the following abbreviated to DPA).¹² In our empirical investigation, 223 audio-visual recordings of Swedish comprehensive school lessons for grade 6 (age 12) are analysed. The lessons were held in the subject of Swedish, in which reading was an important component. Other sources, primarily the curriculum and editions of the documents that were read, are also used to inform our interpretations of the audiovisual data.

The questions guiding the analysis are: What documents were read? How was reading organised and performed as an interpretive activity? How do these reading activities relate to the social and political projects that were invested in the institution of comprehensive school? Before presenting the analysis, the sources and methodology

¹¹ Pawley, ‘Beyond Market Models and Resistance: Organizations as a Middle Layer in the History of Reading’, *Library Quarterly* 79, no. 1 (2009): 73–93. doi: 10.1086/593376

¹² Stukát, ‘Didaktisk processanalys (DPA)’, sound and video recordings 1967–1969 (digitised), Department of Pedagogical, Curricular and Professional Studies, University of Gothenburg.

will be presented in more detail, as will the Swedish comprehensive school understood as an institutional link between readers' activities in the classrooms and wider societal conditions.

Methodology

Didactic Process Analysis

The DPA project was led by Professor Karl-Gustaf Stukát at the School of Education at Gothenburg University in the late 1960s and the early 1970s, and carried out by a group of researchers and technicians, notably Gunlög Bredänge, Björn Gustafsson, Göran Hallin, Anita Ingvarson, Torbjörn Odhagen, and Eva Stigebrandt. In short, the purpose of the project was to investigate how teachers' classroom behaviour affected pupils' learning outcomes; and beside the classroom recordings used in this analysis, the data gathered also included tests and surveys.¹³

The video recordings have been used recently for other specific purposes in a study of the content of lessons in Christianity carried out by Karin Kittelmann Flensner and Göran Larsson.¹⁴ In the present study, all 223 Swedish lessons, which were made

¹³ Gunlög Bredänge et al., *Didaktisk processanalys: Presentation av syften, uppläggning, undersökningsgrupper och mätinstrument samt några beskrivande data* [Didactic process analysis: Presentation of purposes, design, groups, measurement instruments and some descriptive data] (Göteborg: Lärarhögskolan, 1971).

¹⁴ Flensner and Larsson, 'Swedish Religious Education at the End of the 1960s: Classroom Observations, Early Video Ethnography and the National Curriculum of 1962', *British Journal of Religious Education* 36, no. 2 (2013): 202–217. doi: 10.1080/01416200.2013.830961

available after digitisation of the DPA recordings, have been analysed.¹⁵ The recordings cover the academic years of 1967/1968 and 1968/ 1969.

The starting point of the DPA data collection was a sample of 80 teachers from different schools in Gothenburg and the surrounding municipalities. The sample was systematically compiled to be representative of the national population of teachers considering factors such as gender, age, teaching experience, and final grades from their teacher training. The intention was to record ten lessons in different theoretical subjects with one and the same teacher and one and the same class of sixth-year pupils. These ten lessons were supposed be distributed over different subjects in proportion to the time plan outlined in the curriculum.¹⁶

Three different types of classes were recorded: regular classes, support classes, and reading classes. According to the curriculum of 1962, *Läroplan för grundskolan*, the support classes were for pupils with special needs who did not need to attend special school. Reading classes were for pupils with specific reading and writing difficulties.¹⁷ The support classes are overrepresented in the sample as the DPA researchers wanted to be able to statistically analyse support class teaching in its own right, and thus needed a

¹⁵ The original video and sound recordings have been digitised by the video lab of the research centre LinCS (http://www.lin.cs.gu.se/research_organisation/lincs_lab/) in cooperation with the Swedish National Archive of Recorded Sound and Moving Images and the Unit for Media Technology at Gothenburg University.

¹⁶ Bredänge et al., *Didaktisk processanalys*.

¹⁷ Kungl. Skolöverstyrelsen, *Läroplan för grundskolan* [Curriculum for the comprehensive school], (Stockholm, 1962): 64–67.

critical mass in this particular category. Support classes constituted only 6% of the number of classes in the nation at large, but 20% of the DPA sample.¹⁸

Most of the lessons were completely recorded in sound, with every fourth minute also recorded on video. The typical recording arrangement is illustrated in Figure 1. In some cases, only the digitised video or the digitised sound recording is still available, and thus, in the case of the former, only every fourth minute has been analysed. The 223 Swedish lessons include all 80 teachers and their classes. The number of Swedish lessons per teacher in the data ranges from one to five with the majority of teachers (61%) represented with three Swedish lessons each. The proportion of the support classes is comparable to the sample at large, constituting 22.4%.

In the original project, the recordings were used to objectively code specific classroom behaviours and correlate these to other factors such as learning outcomes. The present re-analysis is, however, conducted from an interpretive perspective, aiming to explore the activities performed as meaning-making and tied to wider societal issues.

[Figure 1 near here]

Analytical approach and coding

The analysis of the reading activities taking place in the recorded lessons was guided by Bell's description of how to conduct content analyses of visual images.¹⁹ However, as

¹⁸ Björn Gustafsson and Eva Stigebrandt, *Vad kännetecknar undervisning i hjälpklass? En jämförelse mellan hjälpklass och vanlig klass* [What characterises support class teaching? A comparison between teaching processes in support class and regular class]. (Göteborg: Lärarhögskolan, 1972): 83.

¹⁹ Phillip Bell, 'Content analysis of visual images', in *The Handbook of Visual Analysis*, ed. Theo van Leeuwen and Carey Jewitt (London: Sage, 2001), 11–34.

the data consists of moving images and sound, and as the approach required both inductive and deductive analysis, Bell's method was adjusted to better suit the project.

The analysis was performed as a three-step process: 1) the development and refinement of a coding scheme; 2) the coding of all video and audio files; 3) an analysis with a focus on different reading activities and document types. The first two steps of the process took several months and was a collaborative effort between the two authors. These two steps laid the foundation for the third, which is the analysis presented in this article.

The primary interest in the analysis is reading as an object of teaching and learning. Such reading is defined as instances where pupils and/or teachers intended to practice, teach, learn or for other reasons perform reading as such. This was often made explicit by the teacher at the beginning or in other phases of the lessons. In some cases, this had to be judged from the lesson as a whole including the activities, the documents used, the phrasings of teachers and pupils, and what counted as reading in the curriculum. A common example of what was *not* considered reading as an object of teaching and learning in the analysis, was the practice of reading a text and analysing its grammar. In these cases, which were often framed by an oral presentation on grammar by the teacher, reading was primarily a practical means to fulfil the objective of teaching and learning grammar.

The coding scheme was developed through a process of trials, tests, refinements, and re-coding, where coder interreliability was measured on several occasions. Through the training process, typical recurring classrooms activities were identified, and a common coding praxis for these was established. The final interreliability test was conducted on 190 instances of coding of 10 lessons, and it reached an inter-coder agreement of 96%. It must however be stressed that the almost 150 hours of recordings

are considerably varied and contain several unique situations and activities that were discovered during the main coding process. Thus, development of new descriptors and re-coding were necessary elements of the analysis.

Although each author was responsible for the main analysis of half of the lessons, coding was carried out as a process of collaborative interpretation between the authors. Ambiguous, unclear, or complex situations were therefore continuously discussed and agreed upon in order to achieve consistency. Due to the quality and character of the recordings, it was sometimes impossible to determine with certainty if a particular descriptor was applicable or not.

In the presentation of the analysis, other sources of data will be used, such as textbooks and the curriculum, in order to deepen the analysis of the primary source material and to provide perspectives and possibilities for interpretation. These documents are of particular analytical interest as they express discursive, normative views of reading as a sociocultural practice. The curriculum, in particular, links to the wider sociocultural and institutional context of the compulsory school as a political project.

Ethical considerations

The material analysed in this study gives rise to a number of ethical questions, not least as it can be regarded both as historical source material and as the empirical data of an observational study. Just as Flensner and Larsson, we contend that the data is of value for historical research,²⁰ but we can also identify discrepancies between the requirements for contemporary classrooms studies where video is used and the ethical

²⁰ Flensner and Larsson, 'Swedish Religious Education', 5–6.

considerations of the original study, especially in terms of informed consent.²¹

In the original DPA project, necessary approvals were gathered from the local public school authority, the local branch of the teachers' union, and the principals of each of the participating schools. The participating teachers and pupils were informed of the purpose of the study and were guaranteed confidentiality, but it is not possible to determine from the documentation of the DPA project if the pupils and their guardians gave their informed consent to the pupils' participation in the study.

For the present study, it was impossible to inform all of the participants of the new analyses and to obtain their consent because of the volume, age, and nature of the data. It is generally not possible to determine the identity of the pupils through the recordings, but in order to ensure the full confidentiality of the study participants, any information that could be used to identify individual participants has been left out of the presentation of the data.

Comprehensive school as a political project

The reform work that resulted in the establishment of the Swedish comprehensive and compulsory 9-year school in 1962 had begun already in the 1940s. The hierarchical and differentiated school system at the time was causing several problems, not least concerning the relations between primary and secondary forms of schooling. The Social Democratic government that succeeded the wartime coalition gave the reform work a partly new meaning through a commission in 1946, which, in its report, emphasized the

²¹ E. g. Swedish Research Council, *God forskningssed* [Good research practice] (Stockholm: Vetenskapsrådet, 2011), 42ff.

democratic mission of the school system.²² After several years of trial, thorough investigations, and debate, the final report concerning the comprehensive school was presented in 1961,²³ and the year after, its curriculum, *Läroplan för grundskolan*, was established.²⁴ Reforms were later also carried through on higher educational levels.

In the historical literature, common interpretations of the comprehensive school reform underline that it was an attempt to consolidate the democratic culture of society, and, as such, was an expression of the egalitarian ideals of the ruling Social Democratic party.²⁵ After the Second World War and the experiences of Nazi, fascist, and communist totalitarian regimes in Europe, the new compulsory school system was

²² 1946 års skolkommission, *1946 års skolkommissons betänkande med förslag till riktlinjer för det svenska skolväsendets utveckling* [Report of the school commission of 1946 with suggested guidelines for the development of the Swedish school system], SOU 1948:27 (Stockholm, 1948).

²³ 1957 års skolberedning, *Grundskolan: Betänkande avgivet av 1957 års skolberedning, 6* [Comprehensive school: Report of the school investigation of 1957, 6], SOU 1961:30 (Stockholm, 1948).

²⁴ Kungl. Skolöverstyrelsen, *Läroplan för grundskolan*.

²⁵ See for example, Gunnar Richardson, *Svensk utbildningshistoria: Skola och samhälle förr och nu* [Swedish history of education: School and society past and present] 8th rev. ed. (Lund: Studentlitteratur, 2010); Åke Isling, *Kampen för och emot en demokratisk skola, 1: Samhällsstruktur och skolorganisation* [The struggle for and against a democratic school system, 1: Social structure and school organisation] (Stockholm: Sober, 1980) and Bo Lindensjö and Ulf P. Lundgren, *Utbildningsreformer och politisk styrning* [Educational reform and political governance] 2nd ed. (Stockholm: Liber, 2014). From a Foucauldian perspective, it was recently pointed out that the reform project also carried elements of social discipline, see Qvarsebo, ‘Swedish Progressive School Politics’.

commissioned to foster citizens in a democratic, anti-authoritarian, and independent spirit. The kind of personal growth that the new school system should aim towards, through a high degree of individualisation, was contrasted to the ‘uniform collectives’ that were the result of the kind of authoritarian teaching known from other societies.²⁶ Beside elements of individual development, it was also considered important not only to cultivate a sense of social responsibility towards family and society, but also towards other societies.

In addition, it was seen as important to create equal educational opportunities for all children regardless of their social backgrounds. Through a system of optional subjects in the later grades, and opportunities to take different courses in the 9th grade, only a few elements of differentiation remained, and these were further streamlined in the following curriculum 1969.

The subject of Swedish, in which reading was a central part, was influenced by these ideas of democratic fostering, individualisation, social responsibility, and equality. Before the reform work got underway, courses in the mother tongue were based on a bourgeois tradition of *bildung* and literature, mediating nationalist and religious ideals.²⁷ In the curriculum of 1962, the subject of Swedish had been modernised, with a view to practical application in everyday and working life, and was based on skills rather than content.²⁸ Besides reading, its main components for years 4 to 6 (ages 10–

²⁶ Kungl. Skolöverstyrelsen, *Läroplan för grundskolan*, 32.

²⁷ Lena Kårelund, *Barnboken i samhället* [The children’s book in society] (Lund: Studentlitteratur, 2009).

²⁸ Karin Dahl, ‘Från färdighetsträning till språkutveckling’ [From proficiency training to language development], in *Svenskämnetts historia* [The history of the subject of Swedish], ed. Jan Thavenius (Lund: Studentlitteratur, 1999), 35–89. See also Lars-Göran Malmgren,

12) were speaking; writing; linguistic observations and practice; as well as Danish and Norwegian.²⁹

The curriculum divided ‘reading’ into five categories: 1) reading exercises and study skills; 2) informational reading; 3) experiential reading; 4) free reading; and 5) prepared oral reading. Of these categories, informational and experiential reading generally corresponded to the distinction between fiction and non-fiction (*Ibid.*, 145). In the present study, the categories of informational and experiential reading are particularly salient, as the other forms of reading often occur as versions of these two. Thus, ‘reading exercises and study skills’ related strongly to informational reading, while ‘free reading’ and ‘prepared oral reading’ normally overlapped substantially with experiential reading.

Informational and experiential reading activities

The analysis below is based on 115 Swedish lessons in which some form of reading occurred as an object of learning and teaching. Our results are presented in three sections, corresponding to the research questions. Thus, after considering the materials used for reading, we will turn to the procedures and activities as performed in the classrooms. The last section explores the social and political significance of these activities. Throughout, the curriculum is used as a point of reference and comparison.

Reading materials

The curriculum of 1962 considered school textbooks to be the ‘stomme och ryggrad’

Svenskundervisning i grundskolan [Swedish teaching in comprehensive school] (Lund: Studentlitteratur, 1996).

²⁹ Kungl. Skolöverstyrelsen, *Läroplan för grundskolan*, 126.

(frame and backbone) of reading (*Ibid.*, 151), although it also mentioned several different types of materials. For the middle years (ages 10–12), encyclopaedias, non-fiction, literature for other school subjects, newspapers, and journals were suggested. It was stressed that fiction, for children, youth, and adults, was not only suitable, but even essential. Lyrics, poems, news articles, picture books, and hobby books were included too (*Ibid.*, 144–151). While centred firmly on printed publications, the curriculum was open to a wide variety of documents, genres, and expressions to be used for reading.

The most common reading materials used in the 115 recorded reading lessons can be seen in Table 1. More than one document type could be used during one and the same lesson. The most common reading material was textbooks, usually anthologies, which were evident in more than half of the reading lessons. Other fiction and non-fiction books were used much more sparingly. A recurring activity was for the pupils to read their own texts, which was normally done aloud. The use of other reading materials, such as pamphlets, timetables, and almanacs containing written text constituted a few cases.³⁰ Interestingly, newspapers and journals were completely absent, except in one single case that could not be determined with certainty. The reason for the large percentage of undetermined cases is that many of the documents used were not sufficiently visible in the recordings, nor described in any precise terms by the participants. For example, the pupils could be instructed to open ‘the green book’. The figures for undetermined cases thus mean that it was not possible to conclude with certainty if the document type was used or not during the lesson. [Table 1 near here]

³⁰ Anna Hampson Lundh and Mats Dolatkhah, ‘Reading as Dialogical Document Work: Possibilities for Library and Information Science’, *Journal of Documentation* 72, no. 1 (2016): 127–139. doi: 10.1108/JD-01-2015-0019

Worthy of a reminder is the fact that a document type such as a book does not, of course, necessarily contain written texts only, but also illustrations, diagrams, maps, and so forth. Analyses and studies of expressions such as these were treated as potential forms of reading in the curriculum (*Ibid.*, 148–149). In the recordings, the reading of this kind of content was difficult to distinguish from the reading of written texts in document types such as books, but images were evidently used in 16.5% of the lessons, sometimes separately and sometimes as presented in other types of documents, such as books.

The cases where the ‘reading’ of audiovisual media such as radio and TV occurred amounted to only three, one of which being an instance of reading from an overhead-projected image. It is hard to tell from the 1962 curriculum if this kind of media was seen as materials for ‘reading’, or rather as a related and partly overlapping category of ‘listening, viewing and speaking’ (*Ibid.*, 141–144). However, the following curriculum of 1969 explicitly treats the use of audiovisual media in a section called ‘film and television’ which is placed in the overarching category of ‘reading’.³¹

While the documents used for reading varied, the textbook anthologies were indeed the backbone of reading activities, exactly as outlined by the curriculum. However, several other document types suggested by the curriculum – such as hobby books and newspapers – are completely or almost completely absent from our data.

The character of the textbooks varied, but they normally contained pieces of fiction as well as non-fiction or cross-genre texts such as extracts from travelogues or

³¹ Skolöverstyrelsen, *Läroplan för grundskolan. 2, supplement: Kompletterande anvisningar och kommentarer. Svenska* [Curriculum for the comprehensive school. 2, supplement: Complementary instructions and comments. Swedish]. (Stockholm: Utbildningsförlaget, 1969), 22–25.

texts where non-fictional content was framed by a fictional narrative. A recurring textbook volume in the data is *Läs och förstå: Övningar i tyst läsning* (Read and comprehend: exercises in silent reading).³² This book was published in several editions in a series with different volumes for different grades, and was together with other textbooks, such as editions of Folke Borg's and John Liljeström's *All världens djur* (Animals of the world) (Stockholm: Lindblad, 1965-), used during the lessons. These types of books were based on the idea that the pupils would read a short text of one or a few pages and thereafter respond to questions related to the text. They often included multiple-choice assignments, where the pupils were supposed to find the correct answers to specific questions, often a word, sentence or proposition in the explicit content.

Despite the relatively large number of text types that could not be determined, it is clear that the textbook was the dominant reading material used in the analysed lessons. The textbooks were built on certain assumptions regarding the kind of reading to be promoted in school and often consisted of sections of a few pages of text, accompanied by questions on details in the content with predetermined answers. Thereby, they encouraged a reading procedure, or an ‘interpretive scheme’ to use Darnton’s words, that was oriented towards scanning the surface level of a text and reproducing parts of it – particular facts – rather than interpretation of the text as a whole and its possible implications. Such aspects of reading were often obscured or marginalised by the textbook designs.

³² Thure Danielsson and Gustaf Ronnert, *Läs och förstå: Övningar i tyst läsning, del E*, 2nd ed. (Stockholm: A. V. Carlson, 1962).

The characteristics of the reading materials used give some ideas on how reading was performed in the classrooms. The next section will give nuance to this picture by focussing on reading as a procedure, both as prescribed in the curriculum and as actually performed in classrooms.

The organisation of reading activities

It is possible to view informational and experiential reading as two different ‘interpretive schemes’ that guide reading activities in terms of how they should be performed and what values they ought to instil. Discursively, these schemes are expressed as norms and ideals in the curriculum, and through the recordings it is possible to discern how or whether these norms and ideals were expressed and negotiated through classroom activities. Starting with the curriculum, a number of different elements of informational reading are listed including: finding facts, finding out the meaning of new words, understanding instructions, techniques for finding the key points in a text through underlining and note-taking and using indices and tables of content. More complex activities such as critical scrutiny, summarising, comparing different descriptions of the same object, and drawing conclusions are also mentioned.³³

Moving over to the concept of experiential reading, it should first be noted that the term is used here as a translation of the Swedish word *upplevelseläsning*, which connotes reading characterised by imagination, aesthetic values, meaningful experiences, and the joy of reading. As a concept, experiential reading is often related to leisure reading and reading for pleasure, but, potentially, it also captures values such as new insights, aesthetic and personal development, and so forth. According to the

³³ Kungl. Skolöverstyrelsen, *Läroplan för grundskolan*, 148.

curriculum of 1962, discussions with pupils on fiction and reading experiences were expected to engage pupils with the texts and stimulate their imaginations (150–151). Literary discussions were also seen as a way of entering into social and ethical issues, and of fostering the pupils' sense of social responsibility and solidarity with their families, communities, and people from other races and cultures (*Ibid.*, 146). However, the curriculum also stated that 'Många texter måste få tala för sig själva utan några som helst kommentarer' (Many texts must be allowed to speak for themselves without any comments whatsoever), thus opening up for independent interpretation (*Ibid.*, 150).

One important expectation with regard to experiential reading was that it would invoke a joy of reading. For example, 'rika tillfällen' (rich opportunities) for fiction reading were assumed to influence the pupils' leisure reading habits and contribute to the cultivation of aesthetic taste (*Ibid.*, 145). It was further acknowledged that even in school the pupils had 'legitima behov' (legitimate needs) of satisfying and entertaining reading experiences characterized by imagination, pleasure, drama, or humour. Free reading, where pupils were allowed to choose their own reading materials, was considered well suited to this purpose. Choice in free reading could include not only fiction but also picture books, hobby books and volumes of picture collections (*Ibid.*, 151).

In the recorded classroom activities, many components of informational as well as experiential reading are indeed identifiable as described in the curriculum. Informational reading occurred in 61.7% of the reading lessons and experiential reading in 45.2%. In some lessons, the two overlapped, and in some cases we could not with certainty determine their occurrence or absence during a lesson. The predominance of quantifiable instances informational reading is further accentuated by our qualitative observations as experiential reading, if occurring at all, often held a more marginalised

position during the lessons. It was common that a lesson as a whole was structured around a task of informational reading, centred perhaps on a few sections in a textbook and the questions attached to them. Arranging a whole lesson around experiential reading was much less common. Instead, experiential reading often occurred during the last few minutes of a lesson. Sometimes it seems to have been used to fill out the time, and sometimes, as put by one teacher before reading a piece of fiction aloud to the class: ‘som belöning för väl utfört arbete’ (as a reward for a work well done).³⁴ The idealistic motives of experiential reading, as expressed in the curriculum, were often instrumentalised in this way in actual classroom activities.

We found clear evidence of free reading in only nine of the 115 reading lessons, either as actually occurring or as talked of; for example, in terms of library books to be returned. It is hard to say from the recordings what materials were actually used in these few free reading activities. In one of the lessons, the books for free reading were referred to as ‘de roliga böckerna’ (the fun books).³⁵ In another lesson, when the pupils are assigned to read ‘library books’, which they seemed to have chosen themselves, the teacher answers an audible question with: ‘Nej, men det tycker jag att det är bra, att läsa en *sån* faktabok’ (No, but I think it’s all right to read *that* kind of non-fiction books). This seems to imply, at least in this assignment, that the children were expected to read fiction, but that certain genres of non-fiction were also acceptable.³⁶

³⁴ Recorded Swedish lesson, February 17, 1968. Department of Pedagogical, Curricular and Professional Studies, University of Gothenburg

³⁵ Recorded Swedish lesson, April 3, 1968. Department of Pedagogical, Curricular and Professional Studies, University of Gothenburg

³⁶ Recorded Swedish lesson, March 4, 1968. Department of Pedagogical, Curricular and Professional Studies, University of Gothenburg.

Any deeper discussions of fictional content and reading experiences were rare overall, with only a few examples documented. Furthermore, informational reading activities were often focused on the elements of quick fact finding and on extracting key points, rather than on the more complex activities of comparisons, criticism, and conclusions. Explicitly linking fact finding to the concept of study skills, one teacher introduces an exercise in using indices and tables of content in the following words:

Nå, det första, det vi nu ska ta och lägga märke till, det är att det handlar om studietecknik [skriver 'studietecknik' på tavlan och stryker under]. Det innebär alltså att man ska lära sig att så snabbt som möjligt, utan att gå en massa irrvägar, ta reda på fakta ur en bok. Och då får man utnyttja boken så mycket som möjligt och ta vara på den hjälp som finns, för i böcker finns det allmänt oerhört mycket hjälp.³⁷

(Well, the first thing that you have to realise is that it's about study skills [writes 'study skills' on the blackboard and underlines]. This means learning to find facts in a book, as quickly as possible and without getting lost in its pages. And then you will have to make good use of the book, and take advantage of the help it gives you, because there is generally lots of support to be found in books.)

The extent of independent thinking or open-ended discussion was normally limited also in informational reading activities. Instead, informational reading tasks were often predetermined, not only with regard to the text to be read, but also in terms of exactly what was to be gained from a reading, such as a range of particular facts understood as fixed answers to given questions. For example, some questions answered

³⁷ Recorded Swedish lesson, May 20, 1969. Department of Pedagogical, Curricular and Professional Studies, University of Gothenburg.

by a class after reading a piece on North American farming were: 'Vilken stad i Kanada är medelpunkt för veteodlingen?' (Which Canadian city is the center of wheat production?); 'Hur många djur slaktas dagligen i Chicago?' (How much livestock is slaughtered in Chicago on a daily basis?) and 'Vad kallas de farmer som specialiseras sig på svin- eller nötkreatur?' (What do you call farms that specialise in pigs or cattle?).³⁸

In part, reading patterns such as these could be related to the fact that both informational and experiential reading to a great extent were built on the textbook as a reading material. However, the significance of the textbook was far greater for informational reading. Textbooks were used in 79.4% of the lessons on informational reading, but only in 45.5% of the lessons containing experiential reading. Even if the textbooks contained pieces with overriding fictional qualities, these could well be read in ways related to informational reading. Elements of both informational and experiential reading sometimes occurred in one and the same assignment. For example, even if a fiction text was read aloud with a literary inspiration that signified experiential values, most of the questions on the piece could still be directed towards particular circumstances in the content and not towards developing the imaginations of the pupils in ways suggested by the curriculum.

Prepared oral reading was intended to provide strong, shared reading experiences,³⁹ and could thus be seen as a way of promoting reading as a collaborative act rather than as purely individual. Some forms of oral reading, not necessarily

³⁸ Recorded Swedish lesson, March 8, 1968. Department of Pedagogical, Curricular and Professional Studies, University of Gothenburg

³⁹ Kungl. Skolöverstyrelsen, *Läroplan för grundskolan*, 145, 151.

prepared in advance, occurred in almost half of the reading lessons. In many of these cases reading aloud, at least to some extent, could be seen as experiential through the reader's engagement. Of the lessons where reading aloud occurred, it was either one or more pupils reading (55.4%), teachers (22.8%) or both teacher and pupil(s) (19.3%). Two cases were unclear due to technical problems with the recordings. According to the curriculum, audio recordings of poetry were particularly suitable for classwork as they position the teacher as a 'lyssnare bland eleverna' (listener among the pupils) (*Ibid.*, 150). This type of stepping down from the authoritative position of speaker and explainer could perhaps be seen as an expression of the ideal of fostering the independence of the pupils. However, no such instance was found in our data.

The discourse of reading in the 1962 curriculum emphasised instrumental and rationalistic reading as well as the autonomous and more affective aspects of reading. In the recordings used here as a representation of actual reading activities, both ways of reading do occur, although in particular forms and to different degrees. Informational reading was the predominant mode of reading in the lessons studied. Its motives were rationalistic, often directed to finding facts, and it was rather firmly based on textbooks as reading materials.

Whereas the curriculum of the time reflects a sociocultural tradition of pleasure reading and meaningful reading experiences, we find that, as a performed activity, experiential reading was not only less common, but also often negotiated and pushed into the margins as an object of teaching and learning. Sometimes pleasure reading was instrumentally motivated as a reward or as a way to fill out time at the end of lessons. Experiential reading was more often carried out orally in the class collectively and was somewhat more open to other materials than textbooks. To some extent, it was directed towards triggering imagination and the joyful experience of reading, although these

motives were seldom made explicit, taught, or discussed. Sometimes these values may be seen as implied as, for example, when a fictional text was read aloud with literary inspiration. It does seem, however, that the utilitarian aspects of reading were amplified in classroom activities. These aspects were not only more common, but also more deliberate than immersive and imaginative reading.

Reading, school and society

Using Darnton's terms, we suggest that informational and experiential reading could be seen as two categories of 'interpretive schemes', which were discursively manifested in the curriculum, and employed and enacted in specific ways in actual classroom activities. But what larger 'cultural configurations' were these reading schemes linked to and parts of? The basic distinction between an emotional, pleasurable and relatively autonomous relation to a text, versus an efficient, analytic, and instrumental form of reading is well known from different historical contexts.⁴⁰ In this perspective, it is therefore possible to regard informational and experiential reading, as particular iterations of much older traditions of reading. However, these traditions were drawn upon, articulated, legitimated and given certain purposes in the specific historical situation of Swedish comprehensive and compulsory education in the 1960s. In this view, experiential reading was grafted into the project of post-war democratisation, and inscribed with certain values and purposes. One of these values was the possibility of using reading as a way of cultivating an ethical sense of belonging and social responsibility, not primarily to religion and nation, as was often the case before the war,

⁴⁰ See e. g. Ilkka Mäkinen, 'Reading Like Monks: The Death or Survival of the Love of Reading?', in *Reading in Changing Society*, eds. Marju Laurustin and Peeter Vihalemm (Tartu: University of Tartu Press, 2014), 13–27.

but also to other races and cultures.⁴¹ On the level of explicit interaction, however, these kinds of values were seldom visible in the recorded classroom situations.

Perhaps, this could partly be due to another value that appears in the discourse of experiential reading, namely that the authority of the teacher should not always direct or comment upon the pupils' readings and interpretations, but sometimes let the texts 'speak for themselves' or even take the role of a reader (listener) among many. While these ideas are in line with the anti-authoritarian spirit of fostering independent thinking, it is probably going too far to suggest that the generally low degree of visible interaction around experiential values, is only or even foremost an expression of this idea. The curriculum never suggests that this idea should be pervasive, but applied only now and then. Moreover, there was a shortage of qualified teachers at this time, and substitutes tended to rely heavily on textbooks and other teaching materials. The influence of such materials was therefore particularly great during the 1960s. Furthermore, textbooks allowed the pupils to work at their own pace, which was one way of realising the individualisation deemed so important for the political project of comprehensive schooling.⁴² But even if heavy reliance on textbooks was to some degree motivated by political and practical concerns, it was also a contributing factor in

⁴¹ An international, post-war belief in reading as a way of building international solidarity, primarily through children and children's literature, had been successfully advocated by Jella Lepman and others, and was manifested through the foundation of the International Board of Books for Young People in 1953. See Carl M. Tomlinson, 'The International Children's Literature Movement', *World Literature Today* 77 (April–June 2003):68–70.

⁴² Dahl, 'Från färdighetsträning till språkutveckling', 46–48; Malmgren, *Svenskundervisning i grundskolan*, 15.

creating a reading culture in the classrooms which was not explicitly attentive to the character and values of reading experiences.

What it *was* explicitly attentive to, however, was the informational values of reading. The close connection between these values and study skills is an important key to the relations between reading and the political project of compulsory school.⁴³ Techniques for note-taking, finding and extracting facts, underlining pregnant words and so forth were seen as important reading skills for further studies at higher levels. Preparing all children for progression in the educational system was an important part, perhaps not of a ‘cultural configuration’ in a narrow sense, but certainly for the political configuration of the Social Democratic policy that saw education as a means of achieving equality. However, in the activities recorded in our data, the more abstract and, in a sense, demanding tasks of comparison, conclusion and criticism that were outlined as parts of informational reading, were largely absent.

In summary, we find that in comparison to curriculum discourse, the recorded classroom activities often focused on the explicit surface features of the text. Most cases of reading never proceeded beyond the phase of giving the right answer to questions concerning details of the explicit content of the text at hand. Most of the effort in the analysed lessons seems to have been put into the decontextualisation of particular sentences, propositions, words, or facts from a text, which were seldom explicitly recontextualised into a more holistic understanding of the text or of the larger issues the text tied into.

To a substantial extent, though, the frequent hunting for explicit ‘facts’ in relatively short texts, must be understood as part of an object of intentional and

⁴³ See Malmgren, *ibid.*

systematic teaching and learning for the new comprehensive school system. In this context, such reading procedures (but probably not their predominance and orientation towards surface approaches to text), were motivated and made desirable by political projects of democratisation and of the egalitarian intention of providing equal access to education for all children by training them in ‘study skills’.

Conclusions

Through an analysis and contextualisation of audiovisual recordings of 223 classroom lessons in the Swedish comprehensive school of the late 60s, as well as of reading materials and curriculum discourse, we have attempted to contribute to the understanding of reading practices as parts of the modern project of building a society. Our first aim was to analyse the relations between reading, school and society in the context of post-war Sweden. We have found that reading was commonly performed in line with two overarching ‘interpretive schemes’ referred to as informational and experiential reading, each in turn consisting of a number of techniques and motifs. While the curriculum clearly supported most of the reading activities observed in the recordings, many of its prescriptions were not substantially realised as reading directed toward specific, explicit fragments of a text on surface level dominated over more holistic interpretive approaches.

However, while often appearing superficial and fragmentary, these procedures – but not their predominance – were grounded in purposes related to overarching norms in educational policy. Specifically, they were seen as integral to study skills that were to be taught to all children, in a spirit of egalitarianism. The curriculum stated that not all texts should be discussed and commented upon and this could be seen as a way of fostering individual independence. However, it is not feasible to argue that the almost total absence of discussion on experiential values is a manifestation of such ideas. There

are certainly discrepancies between the curriculum and the activities as performed, primarily regarding the balance and proportion of certain elements. But the reading activities studied in this article were – as such – still mainly grounded in the curriculum and understandable as parts of the political project of building a democratic and egalitarian society. This was achieved not only through exposing the pupils to morally edifying content in the texts they were assigned to read, but through equipping them with specific skills and techniques in reading that they were assumed to be in need of as citizens in a modern society.

These results may also be relevant to early twenty-first century discussions of reading in schools and elsewhere. It is, for example, claimed that due to the impact of digital technology, reading is transforming from a sustained deep reading of long texts to a quick and superficial form of skimming and scanning of textual fragments.⁴⁴ In our data, where reading was primarily directed toward printed media, deep reading emerges as a rather unusual object of explicit teaching and learning, while much superficial and fragmentary skimming do seem to occur. This suggests that quick scanning is not only an effect of digital media, but also a socio-historical resource which is possible to motivate and employ in certain circumstances and for certain purposes. Furthermore, it illustrates how deep and imaginative reading in some important historical circumstances may have been little more than an ideal, which was not substantially realised in practice.

The second aim of the study was to contribute to methodological discussion in the history of reading, by using a particular set of sources. In their study of religious

⁴⁴ Influential criticism of the impact of digital technology on reading practices appears in Nicolas Carr's *The Shallows: What the Internet Is Doing to Our Brains* (London: W. W. Norton, 2010) and Maryanne Wolf's *Proust and the Squid: The Story and Science of the Reading Brain* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2008).

education recorded in the DPA data, Flensner and Larsson concluded that teaching *was* actually following the curriculum and that this is hardly surprising in view of the fact that the teachers were aware that their teaching was being documented.⁴⁵ Our results show much of the same, but we still want to emphasise that the curriculum was followed to certain degrees and in certain ways, which made certain features of reading much more salient than others. Furthermore, if there was a research effect pushing teaching closer to the curriculum than normal, the elements of reading that are often absent from the recordings studied here, such as discussing the ethical implications of a piece of fiction or open-ended discussions of the pupils' reading experiences, would have been even more rare in normal teaching.

While the audiovisual recordings are still a valuable means of understanding what was going on in classrooms (and how it was going on), they do exhibit an important weakness considered as sources to the history of reading: there is very little verbal data revealing how the different readings were experienced by different pupils. Most of the activities are directed by the teacher and most questions asked have a 'correct' answer that both teachers and pupils seem to be interested in arriving at as efficiently as possible. Open-ended questions about the experiences and thoughts of the pupils are very rare. Even if the reading experiences of the pupils are thus largely elusive, qualitative case studies do provide some insights into the meanings constructed in the interplay between pupils, teacher and text.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Flensner and Larsson, 'Swedish Religious Education', 213.

⁴⁶ See Lundh and Dolatkahah, 'Reading as Dialogical Document Work' and Lundh and Dolatkahah, 'Becoming Citizens: Dialogical Document Work in the Classroom of the People's Home', in *Proceedings from the Annual Meeting of the Document Academy* 2, article 14 (2015). <http://ideaexchange.uakron.edu/docam/vol2/iss1/14>.

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Appendix. Descriptors and Frequencies

The following percentages are calculated on all of the 223 recorded Swedish lessons. Note that most of the percentages in the article text are calculated only on the lessons where reading occurred (n=115).

1. Sound file number

2. Video file number

3. Teacher code

4. Lesson number

5. Type of class

Regular 72.2%

Support 22.4%

Reading 5.4%

6. Teacher gender

Male 45.7%

Female 54.3%

7. Year

1967: 5.8%

1968: 66.8%

1969: 27.4%

8. Reading

Does occur 51.6%

Does not occur 45.7%

Cannot be determined 2.7%

9. Silent reading of written text

Does occur 26.5%

Does not occur 69.1%

Cannot be determined 4.5%

10. Oral text reading by male pupil

Does occur 17.9%

Does not occur 79.8%

Cannot be determined 2.2%

11. Number of male pupils reading aloud

Number 1–15 (mean = 0.49 per lesson)

Cannot be determined 8.5%

12. Oral reading by teacher

Does occur 10.8%

Does not occur 87.4%

Cannot be determined 1.8%

13. Oral text reading by female pupil

Does occur 14.3%

Does not occur 83.0%

Cannot be determined 2.7%

14. Number of female pupils reading aloud

Number 1–12 (mean = 0.39 per lesson)

Cannot be determined 8.1%

15. Reading of picture(s)

Does occur 8.5%

Does not occur 88.3%

Cannot be determined 3.1%

16. Pupils' presentation of written text, picture, or audiovisual content

Does occur 4.9%

Does not occur 92.4%

Cannot be determined 2.7%

17. Pupils' dramatization of written text, picture, or audiovisual content

Does occur 4.9%

Does not occur 94.2%

Cannot be determined 0.9%

18. Informational reading

Does occur 31.8%

Does not occur 58.3%

Cannot be determined 9.9%

19. Experiential reading

Does occur 23.3%

Does not occur 65.9%

Cannot be determined 10.8%

20. Pupils' free reading

Does occur 4%

Does not occur 88.3%

Cannot be determined 7.6%

21. Textbook

Does occur 28.7%

Does not occur 59.2%

Cannot be determined 12.1%

22. Fiction other than textbook

Does occur 5.4%

Does not occur 81.2%

Cannot be determined 13.5%

23. Non-fiction other than textbook

Does occur 1.8%

Does not occur 81.6%

Cannot be determined 16.6%

24. Newspaper

Does occur 0%

Does not occur 97.8%

Cannot be determined 2.2%

25. Journal/magazine

Does occur 0%

Does not occur 97.8%

Cannot be determined 2.2%

26. Text written by pupil(s)

Does occur 7.6%

Does not occur 88.8%

Cannot be determined 3.6%

27. Reading test

Does occur 0.4%

Does not occur 99.1%

Cannot be determined 0.4%

28. Dictionary

Does occur 3.1%

Does not occur 94.6%

Cannot be determined 2.2%

29. Other printed text

Does occur 3.1%

Does not occur 93.7%

Cannot be determined 3.1%

30. Audiovisual media

Does occur 1.3%

Does not occur 96.9%

Cannot be determined 1.8%

Table 1. Document types used in % of reading lessons

| Document type | Used | Not used | Undetermined |
|--|------|----------|--------------|
| Textbooks | 55.7 | 26.1 | 18.3 |
| Non-fiction including dictionaries and encyclopaedias | 8.7 | 67.8 | 23.5 |
| Fiction books | 10.4 | 68.7 | 20.9 |
| Pupils' own texts | 14.8 | 82.6 | 2.6 |
| Other written documents | 6.1 | 92.2 | 1.7 |

Note. n=115

Figure 1. Example of a classroom setting, 3 April 1968. An inset focuses on the teacher. The image is re-drawn in order to ensure participants' confidentiality.