# EXAMINING THE VALUE OF LITERARY CONVERSATIONS

## A critical mapping review of research into literary conversations in Scandinavian L1 classrooms

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Abstract

In recent years, researchers and practitioners in the field of Scandinavian L1 literature education have devoted considerable attention to literary conversations. In the Scandinavian countries, research into literature education has traditionally been characterized by qualitative studies. These tend to be published in various genres and are often written in a local language. This publishing pattern makes it challenging to obtain an overview of the field and its subfields. Hence there is an obvious need for a systematic review to map out the landscape of existing research into literary conversations. To that end, the present study investigates the characteristics of qualitative research into literary conversations in the Scandinavian L1 school subject with regard to key research approaches used, to the characteristics of the conversations studied, and to the pedagogical value ascribed to literary conversations. The findings show a joint belief in the value of literary conversations as a community for students' learning in Scandinavian research. Multiple pedagogical gains are accounted for, both from the collaboration within the community itself and as a result of such collective work. In addition, the wide range of theoretical and methodological approaches mapped out from the studies investigated reveal some interesting challenges and also possible gains if further research is conducted.

Keywords: literature discussion, literary dialogue, literature education, language arts, L1 education, literature didactics

[1] Both authors contributed equally to all phases of this study

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Discussing or talking about literature in L1 subjects is far from new and far from a specific Scandinavian[2] phenomenon. As a result of influence from proponents of New Criticism and Reader Response Theory such as Richards (1929), Rosenblatt (1995), Iser (1978), and Fish (1980), students' participation in discussions about literature has long been a core element in L1 education across the world, perhaps even since the 1950s. In Scandinavia, a student-centered pedagogy has progressively strengthened the role of the students' voices in instruction from the 1970s to the present. Regarding the L1 literature subject, this trend was triggered, to a large extent, by the work of a Swedish research group called Pedagogiska Gruppen [The Pedagogic Group], which was influenced by the work of U.S. reader-response theorists. In today's literature education, Kaspersen (2012) has identified four main positions: text-based, reader-oriented, socio-cultural, and media-oriented. The relationship between the first two of those—sometimes seen as dichotomous—has attracted much attention from both researchers and practitioners (e.g., Rødnes, 2014). Indeed, the current formal curricula for the Scandinavian L1 subjects can be read as a response to those positions, with the multiple purposes of literature education stated in those curricula reflecting an overarching aim of molding and developing good citizens (Gourvennec et al., 2020).

As the Scandinavian research landscape has developed in dialogue with the educational landscape, specific attention has increasingly been devoted in L1 research to conversations about literature or literary texts. The literary conversation has been framed as a prominent objective of study for various purposes. For instance, recent years have seen a renewed interest in oracy, where Scandinavian research interests mirror those manifested in a broader international context regarding not only the characteristics and assessment of oral skills but also the issues of dialogic instruction and progressive education.

The growth of research into literary conversations has prompted increasing interest from in-service and pre-service teachers desiring to learn from it or use it for assignments and dissertations. However, the typical publication pattern for L1-related research in the Scandinavian countries represents an obstacle to this. Traditionally, such research is published in Scandinavian-language publications, and to a large extent not in journals but in books, which may be monographs or edited volumes. In recent years, however, financial incentives for universities have created a growing tendency to publish in peer-reviewed journals, and also to do so in English-language ones. There are some national databases covering the field, but they do so

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[2] *The Scandinavian countries are Denmark, Norway, and Sweden. However, the present study also includes research from Swedish-language contexts in Finland, where about 5 percent of the population are L1 speakers of Swedish and where Swedish and Finnish are both official languages. The Scandinavian languages of Danish, Norwegian and Swedish are mutually intelligible, particularly in writing. Researchers writing in one of them often include quotations in the others without providing their readers with a translation.*

in different and not always consistent ways (e.g., keywords and abstracts may be included or not, some articles from an edited volume may be included, whereas others from the same publication may not). Hence there is an obvious need for a systematic mapping review of the field. Such a review may serve several purposes. Not only will it help Scandinavian-speaking students and researchers find relevant information, thus ensuring that new research will be able to draw upon the existing research base, but it will also lay the foundation for a dialogue between the existing non-English-language research and the broader international research community.

*1.1  What is a literary conversation?*

The concept of "literary conversation" or "literary dialogue" refers to dialogue, communication, and exchange in relation to literary works. It can encompass not only formal and informal conversations between different persons about the meaning and significance of a text, but also the ongoing dialogue taking place between a text and its readers over time. In addition, "literary dialogue" may also refer to the exchange of ideas and perspectives among authors, critics, and readers—both through more formal written and spoken communication, such as reviews, essays, and public talks, and through more informal exchanges between readers and authors. In this study, however, we have a narrower focus. What we are interested in are conversations occurring as part of formal education, in our case in the Scandinavian L1 subjects. Even with this narrower focus, however, it must be noted that both researchers and teachers refer to the term "literary conversation"[3] with various presumptions of the term in mind. Hence confusion regarding definitions and conceptualizations is not uncommon.

The Norwegian researcher Laila Aase (2005) was—to the best of our knowledge—the first trying to frame this activity and make the case for its instructional potential when it comes to promoting the *Bildung* function of reading literature. She defined literary conversations as "classroom conversations that give expression to reading experiences and whose purpose is to explore literary texts on the basis of those experiences", adding that a literary conversation is "a collective activity that is specific to literature instruction in school" (Aase, 2005, p. 106, our translation). The Swedish researcher Eva Hultin (2006) applied the perspective of *speech genres* (cf. Bakhtin, 1986) when empirically exploring the question of what genres of conversation about literature were discernible in Swedish upper-secondary L1 classrooms. She identified four genres that differed in their purpose, structure, conversation pattern, and underlying literary and epistemological beliefs: teaching-while-examining ("the teaching examination"), the text-oriented talk, the culturally oriented talk, and the informal book talk. In other contexts, the term "literary conversation" has been used about a particular instructional method with predefined phases and rules (e.g., Hennig, 2017).

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[3] *In Norwegian—"litterær samtale".*

Taken together, the Scandinavian use of the term literary conversation might be referring to both broader English terms like *text talk*, and terms referring to specific methods for text conversations like *book talk*, *literature circle/book clubs*, and *shared reading*. To sum up, this term as used today in the Scandinavian educational framework has multiple meanings, ranging from a particular instructional method to *any* student- or teacher-led talk about literary texts (e.g., novels, short stories, poems) taking place in an educational setting.

### 1.2 The present study

In the present study, we perform a systematic mapping review (Gough et al., 2017; Grant & Booth, 2009) of research into literary conversations in Scandinavian L1 classrooms published since the beginning of the present millennium. We base our review on an inclusive definition of the term "literary conversation." Concretely, to be included, research must investigate "conversation" (discussion, talk, any oral interaction) among students, with or without the participation of one or several teachers, about any written literary text. Further, our use of "literary" includes any texts traditionally labelled as "litteratur" or "skjønnlitteratur" in Scandinavian L1 subjects, that is, novels, short stories, poetry, drama, children's books, picture books, comics, etc. The aim of the study is to *make an inventory of Scandinavian qualitative research into literary conversations in the L1 school subject, critically examining it with regard to (i) the key research approaches used, (ii) the characteristics of the conversations studied, and (iii) the pedagogical value ascribed by it to literary conversations*.

## 2.   METHOD

### 2.1 Searches and selection of articles

An extensive literature search was performed in a systematic manner, combining three clusters of search terms with the following key terms: (i) *literary conversation*, broken down into three subclusters targeting (a) the combined key term *literary conversation* and the individual key terms (b) *literature* and (c) *conversation*; (ii) *Scandinavian* or *Nordic*[4] as well as the names of the countries of interest (*Denmark*, *Norway*, *Sweden*) and the (identical) words for the L1 school subjects and the main languages of those countries (*Danish*, *Norwegian*, *Swedish*); and (iii) key terms such as *instruction*, *education*, and *teaching*, to capture the school setting. The searches were limited to title, abstract, and keywords, and to the publication period 2000–

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[4] *The Nordic countries are the Scandinavian ones plus (inter alia) Finland and Iceland. In Scandinavia, it is fairly common to refer to the larger group of countries rather than to the smaller one, meaning that a study of only Scandinavian countries might well be assigned the keyword "Nordic."*

2022 (all searches were rerun in April 2023). Boolean combinations of key terms and related terms were tested and revised several times and in different databases (ERIC, Scopus, JSTOR, Google Scholar, Oria, and The Danish Royal Library) to ensure that relevant studies would be included, and irrelevant ones excluded as far as possible. However, with search terms such as *literature* and *discussion*, which are highly likely to appear in article abstracts generally, we had to accept a large number of irrelevant studies in our search results. The final English search string (used in the Scopus database) is shown in Figure 1.

*Figure 1. Final Boolean search string in Scopus*

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( ( TITLE -ABS-KEY ( "literature conversation*"  OR  "literary conversation*"  OR  "book talk*"
OR  "book circle*"  OR  "reading circle*"  OR  "shared reading" )  AND  TITLE-ABS-KEY ( nordic
OR  scandinavia*  OR  sweden  OR  swedish  OR  norway  OR  norwegian  OR  denmark  OR  danish
OR  finland  OR  finnish )  AND  TITLE-ABS-KEY ( instruction  OR  didactic*  OR  pedagog*  OR
teaching  OR  lesson*  OR  education ) )  AND  PUBYEAR > 1999  AND  PUBYEAR > 1999 )  OR  ( (
TITLE-ABS-KEY ( literature  OR  literary  OR  fiction*  OR  book*  OR  narrative )  AND  TITLE-
ABS-KEY ( conversation*  OR  dialogue*  OR  discussion* ) )  AND  TITLE-ABS-KEY ( nordic  OR
scandinavia*  OR  sweden  OR  swedish  OR  norway  OR  norwegian  OR  denmark  OR  danish  OR
finland  OR  finnish )  AND  TITLE-ABS-KEY ( instruction  OR  didactic*  OR  pedagog*  OR
teaching  OR  lesson*  OR  education ) )
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The literature searches were performed in two international databases: Scopus, and ERIC. Further, the search terms were translated and adapted to the Scandinavian languages and setting. The translations to Danish and Swedish were discussed with a native speaking Danish and Swedish researcher in literature education respectively. These researchers were further encouraged to add related terms used in their national setting. The final translated search strings were adapted for use in Oria, the Norwegian database for specialized and university libraries, its Danish (the Royal Danish Library) and Swedish (the Swedish version of Onesearch) equivalents, and the Swedish database for research publications, Swepub. In these Scandinavian databases, full-text searchers were performed since the databases are inconsistent regarding the inclusion of abstracts and keywords. Although we initially performed searches also in Google Scholar and JSTOR, we experienced that systematic searches did not yield reliable results. This lack of reliability in these databases is currently up for discussion in the literature (Gusenbauer & Haddaway, 2020). Hence, we abandoned systematic searches in these databases. Finally, hand searches were performed of key Nordic L1-educational research journals and edited books (including conference proceedings from biannual national and regional L1 education related conferences).

The results from the international databases were exported to the Zotero reference-management software and then imported to the Rayyan research tool for systematic literature reviews. Their titles and abstracts were screened in accordance with our criteria for inclusion and exclusion (see Table 1). In the national databases,

the amount of information varies between entries, and exported items are not optimized for screening in Rayyan. For this reason, the results from Oria and the Danish Royal Library were screened within the database. Institutional access was required to search in Swedish databases. Hence, through a Swedish colleague, a university librarian at his institution performed the searches, based on the Swedish search string. We were provided with reports of results from searches in both databases, including authors, title and publication source. Based on this information, we identified the full texts for records screening. Hand searches were performed in the journal's portal, through digital access to edited volumes, and paper-based screening was performed of edited volumes available only in print.

*Table 1. Inclusion and exclusion criteria*

| Criterion | Included | Excluded |
|---|---|---|
| Educational level | Primary and secondary education (roughly, ages 6–19) | Early-childhood education/preschool, post-secondary education, and outside an educational context |
| School subject and geographical setting | Scandinavian L1 subject (Danish in Denmark, Norwegian in Norway, Swedish in Sweden and Swedish-speaking parts of Finland) | Other subjects, other geographical regions |
| Scientific quality and type of publication | Empirical articles in peer-reviewed journals or edited volumes and conference proceedings | Meta-analyses, literature reviews, non-peer-reviewed articles, books other than peer-reviewed edited volumes, and other types of publications |
| Research design | Qualitative studies | Quantitative studies |
| Publication date | January 2000–September 2022 | Before 2000 and after September 2022 |
| Publication language | English and Scandinavian languages (Danish, Norwegian, and Swedish) | Other languages |
| Data | Literary conversations among students with or without teacher, in groups or whole-class | Interviews, surveys, and other empirical data |

Duplicates were removed at two stages. First, 14 duplicates were removed in Zotero, before importing the records for screening in Rayyan. Second, another 34 duplicates were identified in Rayyan and removed. Based on this, 1400 records from the databases were screened for eligibility, whereof 47 were assessed for eligibility and 11 were excluded in line with our exclusion criterion. Finally, we included 36 studies from the databases. From the hand searches, we included 12 studies in our review, leaving a total of 48 articles that met the inclusion criteria. The selection procedure

is conducted and reported in line with the PRISMA guidelines (see Page et al., 2021), as illustrated in Figure 2.

*Figure 2. Overview of selection procedure*
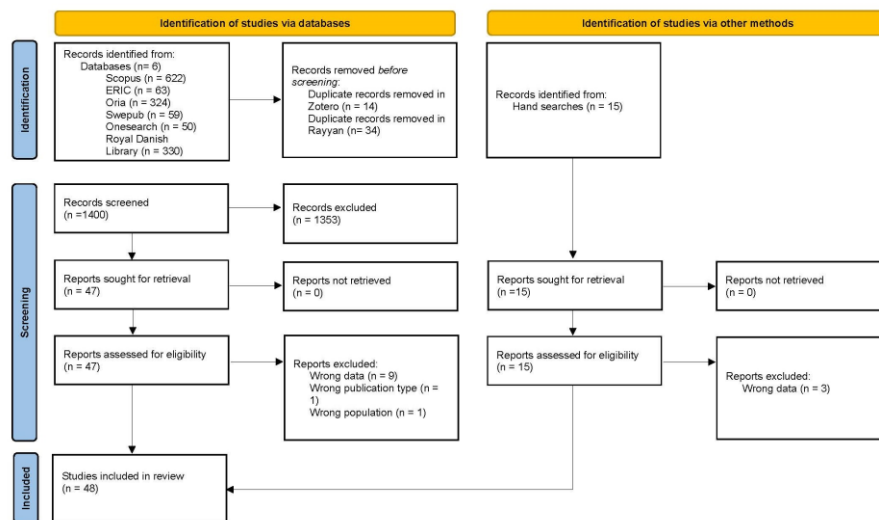


## 2.2 Method of analysis

The articles included were coded in Excel for (i) publication year, language, and type (research journal or edited volume); (ii) characteristics of the empirical data, including country, educational level, student age, and data-material size (number of conversations, classes, and participants); (iii) type of conversation, including whole-class or group conversations and teacher- or student-led ones; (iv) characteristics of the text(s) read by the students, including genre, title, and full text or excerpt; (v) theoretical perspective; (vi) method of analysis; and (vii) research aim. Both authors conducted the coding. To ensure agreement about the operationalization of the codes and adjustments to them, joint coding sessions were carried out in the first phases of coding, and any ambiguous cases subsequently encountered were discussed to ensure valid and reliable coding of all studies. The output of the coding process was further explored to merge the theories and methods of analysis used in the various studies into larger categories given more generic codes (such as Reception Theory and Discourse Analysis). These codes and research aims of the studies were then used as a basis for inferring the pedagogical value ascribed by the studies to the literary conversation.

## 3.   RESULTS

In this section, we will first concentrate on the key research approaches used in the studies and on the characteristics of the conversations studied, by presenting information about publication type and educational context and about the theoretical and methodological approaches of the studies. Second, we will present information about the pedagogical value ascribed to literary conversations in the corpus, against the background of the research aim of the respective studies. The results of the mapping review are summarized in Table 2.

### 3.1  Publication type and educational context

A large majority (41) of the studies included were published in research journals, while only seven of them were published in peer-reviewed edited volumes. Regarding publication year, we find a strong increase over the 23-year publication period, with only ten studies identified from the first 12 years. When it comes to publication language, 32 of the studies were written in a Scandinavian language—Danish (2), Norwegian (16), or Swedish (14)—while 16 were written in English. Geographically, we found there to be an unequal representation in that most studies investigated literary conversations taking place in either Swedish (24) or Norwegian (21) classrooms. The limited number from Denmark (2) is difficult to explain, while the modest number from Swedish-language classrooms in Finland (2) might be expected given that only 5% of the Finnish population are L1 speakers of Swedish (InfoFinland, 2023) It should be noted that one of the publications (Höglund & Rørbech, 2021), accounted for as Finnish and Danish respectively, is a collaborative publication, from both Finnish and Danish classrooms. Consequently, the sum of publications from Finnish and Danish classrooms is three.

The distribution of research across educational levels is as follows: seven studies in lower-primary school, 14 in upper-primary school, 18 in lower-secondary school (of which three are also included in the number for upper-primary school), and finally 12 in upper-secondary school.

Further, the literary conversations in the corpus are evenly distributed between student-led (25) and teacher-led (25, this includes librarian-led conversations) ones (in three publications (Höglund & Rørbech, 2021; Kähkölä & Rättyä, 2021; Rødnes, 2018), both student-led and teacher-led conversations are included in the same study), but there are many more cases of group conversations (32, this includes one half-class conversation) than whole-class conversations (18) (in two publications (Höglund & Rørbech, 2021; Rødnes, 2018), both group- and whole-class conversations are included in the same study). This preference may reflect various presumptions, for instance that smaller groups increase the likelihood that all students will participate in conversations, and it may also reflect ideas about the importance of entrusting students with responsibility and giving them greater freedom.

In the conversations studied, the students and (sometimes) teachers talked about literary texts belonging to different genres. Prose (ranging from the canonical to fantasy and science-fiction novels, epic poems, and from children's books and novels for young adults to short stories and novels for an adult audience) is the most common, represented in 37 studies. However, other genres also occur; poems (including song lyrics, and a children's poem) are represented in nine studies, and multimodal genres (such as picture books and comic strips) are represented in five. Hence, although the texts in question do not represent the full range of genres included in the Scandinavian L1 subjects within and across the different educational levels, they do manifest considerable variation in terms of intended reader age, literary epoch, and genre.

### 3.2 Theoretical approaches taken

The studies rely on various theoretical perspectives. Since they draw upon different fields of study, they can be classified into a fairly large number of categories. For readability, however, the various theoretical perspectives can be clustered into five broad "umbrella" categories. The first, and by far largest, category is *Literary and Cultural Theories.* This category includes theories that range from socio-cultural theories, dialogic theories, and reception theories to New Literacy Studies, hermeneutics, and deconstruction. The domination represented by this category might be explained by the fact that studies draw on multiple theoretical perspectives, for instance both socio-cultural, dialogic, reception and literary theory. Another relatively large category is *Educational Theories*, which includes perspectives of oracy, educational psychology, literacy events and practices, reading theory and reception, engagement theory, and literature teaching. The categories of *Linguistic and Language Theories and Psychological and Social Theories* are equally present in the corpus. The former includes systemic-functional linguistics, discourse theory, conversation analysis, speech-act theory, intertextual literacy, and social semiotics. The latter includes perspectives such as social psychology theory, dissonance theory, negotiation theory, and emotional literacy. The final and smallest category is *Philosophical Theories*, which includes philosophy and phenomenology.

It is important to note that this categorization with respect to theoretical perspectives is not exhaustive and that other categorizations may be possible, based on different criteria or frameworks. Also, looking at theoretical labels such as 'New Literacy studies' and 'literacy practices and events' in isolation, may raise questions of whether these theories primarily are to be conceived as cultural or educational theories, language theories or social theories. In our categorization above, we have relied on our interpretation of the authors' use of the theories. In addition, several of the studies in the corpus employ theories from more than one of these "umbrellas". For example, Anderson and Hallesson (2013) draw upon both systemic-functional linguistics and reception theory, while Nissen (2020) takes both a reception-theoretical and a philosophical perspective.

As previously mentioned, it seems clear that theories deriving from the fields of literature, culture, and education dominate in the corpus. This dominance is not surprising given the research field in question but may nevertheless demonstrate something of interest. The preferred perspectives imply that literary conversation is a place in which traditional disciplines (literary, art, language, culture) meet theories of pedagogy and education. This implication will be further examined in the discussion.

### 3.3 Methods of analysis used

The methods of analysis used in the corpus can largely be categorized as belonging to three clusters. The first one encompasses established methods for studying communication and, in particular, oral communication (represented by 20 studies). This includes methods such as interaction analysis (4), conversation analysis (6), discourse analysis (6), and varieties of discourse analysis such as dialogic discourse analysis (2), critical discourse analysis (1), and theoretically driven discourse analysis (1). The second cluster includes approaches that involve the analysis of themes and content (5), such as thematic analysis (3), thematic content analysis (1), and directed content analysis (1). Third, there is a large cluster (21) of theoretically driven analysis. Some of the theoretically driven analysis in this cluster may tend toward thematic analysis, others do not explicitly clarify how the analysis is conducted. Beyond these three clusters, there is also one example of grounded theory and one labeled "exploratory analysis."

At a "micro-methodological" level, however, the studies investigated often present few analytical examples, usually from just one conversation. Also, the studies often lack detailed descriptions of how the spoken interactions explored were analyzed.

*Table 2. Key characteristics of the studies identified in the mapping survey*

| Study and publication language | Genre of text(s) discussed | Research aim | Theory | Method of analysis | Pedagogical value (for students) ascribed to literary conversations | Origin of material[a] |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Eriksson (2002), English | Young-adult novels | To investigate dilemmas in what teachers do, relative to curricula and ideals, and to discuss how their organization of students' reading involves dilemmas that are displayed in actual book-talk practices. | Social/discursive psychology | Discourse analysis | Not stated | 3 teacher-led group conversations in upper-primary and lower-secondary school (10–14 years), Sweden |
| de Ven (2005), English | Young-adult novels | To investigate the nature and purpose of thematic literature teaching, the instructional methods used, and the literary reception involved. | Reception, Reading, Dissonance | Grounded theory | An arena for constructing and reconstructing their reality | 2 teacher-led whole-class conversations in upper-primary school (11–13 years), Sweden |
| Eriksson and Aronsson (2005), English | Young-adult novels | To investigate – in light of egalitarian goals – how teachers treat students' notions of the "Other" in discussions about children's literature | Literary history | Theoretically driven | Not stated | 3 teacher/librarian-led group conversations in upper-primary and lower-secondary school (10–14 years), Sweden |
| Barajas (2008), English | Young-adult novels | To investigate how gender equality is reflected in book talk in a school setting and how gender is treated in discussions with children. | Social/discursive psychology | Discourse analysis | An arena to co-construct gender and to challenge stereotypical gender differences | 4 teacher-led group conversations in lower-primary and upper-primary school (10–14 years), Sweden |

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|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Rødnes (2009), English | Novels | To investigate, through a study of students' talk, how they reason and argue to make sense of fiction. | Socio-cultural | Interaction analysis | An arena for developing their understanding of literature | 2 student-led group conversations in upper-secondary school (16–18 years), Norway |
| Rødnes and Ludvigsen (2009), Norwegian | Novels | To investigate students' reasoning in and across different types of learning activities to understand how the students work toward interpretations of literature. | Socio-cultural, Dialogic | Theoretically driven | An arena for using their own experience and language | 1 student-led group conversation in upper-secondary school (17–18 years), Norway |
| Tengberg (2009a), Swedish | Young-adult novels | To investigate how students negotiate gender identities and how this negotiation is related to their stance toward the literary text. | Dialogic, Reception, Gender | Interaction analysis | Not stated | 1 teacher-led group conversation in lower-secondary school (14 years), Sweden |
| Tengberg (2009b), Swedish | Young-adult novels | To investigate the opportunities offered by conversation for developing perspectives on literary texts and literary reading. | Reception, Interaction | Theoretically driven | Is explored | Teacher-led half-class conversations in lower-secondary school (14 years), Sweden |
| Matre and Fottland (2011), English | Children's books | To investigate how systematic stimulation of children's linguistic and conversational skills might affect their ability to participate in dialogues, their reading comprehension, and their building of identity. | Socio-cultural, Dialogic | Conversation analysis | An arena for joint intellectual activity, meaning-making, and identity development | Three student-led group conversations (same group) in lower-primary school (8 years), Norway |
| Asplund (2011), Swedish | Young adult novel | To investigate how young working-class men engage in literary discussion. | Educational | Conversation analysis | An arena for construing identity as professionals and as engaged and competent readers. | 1 student-led group conversation in vocational upper-secondary school, (16 years), Sweden |

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|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Asplund (2012), English | Novels | To investigate how young working-class men engage in literary discussion. | Reception | Conversation analysis | An arena for construing themselves as competent readers, involving themselves in literature instruction, and taking responsibility for their own learning | 1 student-led group conversation in vocational upper-secondary school (18–19 years), Sweden |
| Høegh (2012), Danish | Poems | To explore potential methods for (i) oral text presentation/oracy, (ii) the handling of oral texts, and (iii) teachers' analysis of and reflection on classroom dialogue as text analysis. | Oracy, Pedagogy, Response | Theoretically driven | An arena for developing their oral interpretation and oracy skills | 2 teacher-led whole-class conversations in upper-secondary school (16–17 years), Denmark |
| Rødnes (2012), English | Comic strips | To investigate students' work on analyzing a literary text, with a focus on how they use literary-analytical concepts as instructional concepts, and on how those concepts mediate between discussions and writing. | Socio-cultural, Dialogic, Educational | Interaction analysis | An arena for trying out interpretations of the text and using analytical concepts, and a place where students' voices may contribute to the richness of the understanding of the literary text and of the scholarly concepts | 1 student-led group conversation in upper-secondary school (17–18 years), Norway |
| Anderson and Hallesson (2013), Swedish | Epic poems | To describe text movability and cohesion between text and conversation in conversations about texts in L1 Swedish (and History) classes. | Systemic-functional linguistics, Reception | Theoretically driven | An arena for contributing to understanding | 1 teacher-led whole-class conversation in vocational upper-secondary school (16 years), Sweden |
| Asplund and Prieto (2013), English | Novels | To investigate how boys on a vehicle-engineering program in an upper-secondary school use their reading and literature discussion in their | Reception, Reading, Literature | Conversation analysis | An arena for creating a sense of togetherness, taking responsibility for their own learning, and | 1 student-led group conversation in vocational upper- |

| | | identity construction and how they create the social space of which they are a part. | didactics, Educational | | creating identity and social place | secondary school (16–17 years), Sweden |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Varga (2013a), Swedish | Young-adult novels | To show how a teacher may support the development of students' metacognitive skills. | Reception, Educational psychology, Metacognition, Social psychology | Thematic analysis | An arena for developing metacognitive skills | 1 teacher-led whole-class conversation in upper-primary school (11–12 years), Sweden |
| Varga (2013b), Swedish | Young-adult novels, short stories | To explore teachers' utterances during literary discussions in order to identify, illustrate, and analyze critical aspects that support the development of students' reading comprehension. | Speech act | Theoretically driven | An arena to support reading comprehension and the use of subject-specific language | 4 teacher-led whole-class conversations in 2 classes in upper-primary and lower-secondary school (11–12 years), Sweden |
| Ekvall and Skåve (2014), Swedish | Young-adult novels | To investigate the tasks assigned to students for their book talk. | Critical literacy, Literary competence, Reception | Critical discourse analysis | Is explored | 4 student-led group conversations involving 2–4 students in upper-primary school (11 years), Sweden |
| Gourvennec et al. (2014), Norwegian | Poems | To investigate similarities and differences in involvement and depth between students' and researchers' literary conversations. | New literacy studies, Phenomenology, Dialogic | Theoretically driven | An arena for engagement in literary texts, and for disciplinary practice | 1 student-led group conversation in upper-secondary school (16 years), Norway |
| Wirdenäs (2014), Swedish | Young-adult novels | To investigate how classroom interaction works in relation to the teacher's plans. | Conversation analysis | Conversation analysis | An arena where their interpretation may be supported | 1 teacher-led whole-class conversation in upper-primary school (13 years), Sweden |

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|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Andersson-Bakken (2015), Norwegian | Young-adult novels | To investigate the structure of teacher questions and their uptake in a literary conversation. | Dialogic | Theoretically driven | An arena for them to contribute to readings based on their own experiences | 1 teacher-led whole-class conversation in lower-secondary school (14 years), Norway |
| Varga (2015), Swedish | Young adult novels, short story | To investigate critical aspects in the conversation supporting students to develop metacognition. which linguistic teaching strategies teachers use to support students' development of metacognitive perspectives on reading comprehension and which metacognitive | Metacognition, Reading strategies | Theoretically driven | An arena for developing metacognitive perspectives through the use of linguistic strategies | 2 teacher-led whole-class conversations in upper-primary school (12–13 years), Sweden |
| Gourvennec (2016), Norwegian | Poems | To contribute knowledge about the development of literary disciplinarity as it emerges in the meaning-making process between reader(s) and text. | New literacy studies, Phenomenology, Engagement, Dialogic | Discourse analysis | An arena for exploring texts, trying out interpretations, and developing a disciplinary identity, where their perceived relevance for disciplinary development may be supported | 1 student-led group conversation involving 3 students in upper-secondary school (16 years), Norway |
| Ulland (2016), Norwegian | Children's books | To investigate the significance of the relationship between teacher, student, and text, and its potential for the development of students' Bildung. | Bildung | Theoretically driven | An arena for the development of ethical and aesthetic reflection, and for responding with their own voices and acting as independent participants in the group | 1 teacher-led group conversation involving 4 students in upper-primary school (10 years), Norway |

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|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Varga (2016), Swedish | Young adult novels, short story | To investigate how teachers' questions support students' reading ability | Socio-cultural, Reception | Theoretically driven | An arena for developing reading ability | 2 teacher-led whole-class conversations in upper-primary school (12–13 years), Sweden. |
| Sønneland and Skaftun (2017), Norwegian | Short stories | To investigate what happens when students in lower-secondary school work on subject-specific problems in the Norwegian L1 subject by themselves and when students identified as being passive meet to talk about a demanding text on their own. | New literacy studies | Discourse analysis | An arena for developing discursive resources | 5 student-led group conversations in lower-secondary school (13 years), Norway |
| Varga (2017), Swedish | Short stories | To investigate how students' reading skills relates to previous reading instruction. | Socio-cultural. Reading strategies, Reception | Theoretically driven | An arena for developing reading ability | 7 student-led group conversations involving 27 students in lower-secondary school (15 years), Sweden. |
| Rødnes (2018), Norwegian | Song lyrics | To investigate how the teacher's instruction supports students' work, to examine what happens in group and whole-class discussions through student talk and teacher response, and to explore how a specific method ("Samtavla") works as a pedagogical tool. | Reception, Dialogic, Literary competence | Interaction analysis | An arena for exploring and resolving textual complexities together (group conversation) and for developing their thinking and reasoning (teacher-led whole-class conversation) | 1 teacher-led whole-class conversation and 1 student-led group conversation in lower-secondary school (15 years), Norway |
| Sønneland (2018), Norwegian | Short stories | To investigate variation in student engagement in literary conversations. | Dialogic, Engagement | Dialogic discourse analysis | An arena for identifying subject-specific problems in literary texts | 18 student-led group conversations in lower-secondary school (14 years), Norway |

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| Sønneland (2019), English | Short stories | To investigate what aspects of a literary text attract students' attention when they are engaged in the text as a problem. | Dialogic, Engagement, Literary | Theoretically driven | An arena for collaborating in a manner that leads the way toward a subject-specific practice | 18 student-led group conversations in lower-secondary school (14–15 years), Norway |
| Hennig (2020a), Norwegian | Short stories | To investigate what kind of literary proficiency is expressed in a student-led book circle about a demanding short story, and to identify the kinds of growth points contained in the conversation. | Reception, Dialogue, Literary competence | Theoretically driven | An arena for expressing literary proficiency | 1 student-led group conversation in lower-secondary school (15 years), Norway |
| Hennig (2020b), Norwegian | Young-adult novels | To investigate how students initiate and develop sequences of exploratory talk/dialogue in student-led conversations about novels from the culture associated with their own leisure activities. | Reception, Dialogic | Theoretically driven | An arena for contributing their own/original interpretations and responses to literary texts | 2 student-led group conversations in lower-secondary school (14 years), Norway |
| Nissen (2020), Swedish | Young-adult novels | To explore if it is possible to learn ethics through reading and working with literary texts. | Reception, Philosophy | Theoretically driven | An arena for developing ethical reflections | 5 student-led group conversations in lower-secondary school (15 years), Sweden |
| Revelj (2020), Swedish | Young-adult novels | To examine the linguistic and interactional resources that readers make use of in the conversation to deal with their epistemic rights and take epistemic responsibility; to investigate toward which epistemic domains the readers orient themselves; and to test the productivity of conversational- | Conversation analysis | Conversation analysis | An arena for developing different kinds of epistemic attitude | 2 student-led group conversations in upper-secondary school (age not given), Sweden |

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| | | analytical terms when analyzing literary conversations. | | | | |
| Schmidt (2020), English | Children's books | To investigate the purpose and nature of book talks. | Literacy/literacy practices, Hermeneutics, Education, Dialogic, Discourse, Social semiotic | Theoretically driven discourse analysis | An arena for developing a view of themselves as readers | 3 librarian-led whole-class conversations in lower-primary school (8 years), Sweden |
| Skaftun (2020), Norwegian | Children's poems | To explore a literacy praxis in second grade in order to critically reflect on how this activity could have been, combining literacy, orality, and subject-specific thinking and speaking. | Literacy, Literacy events and practice, Oracy | Discourse analysis | An arena for bridging the gap between everyday language and academic language, thinking together, using their own voice, receiving response from equals, and developing language and thinking | 1 teacher-led whole-class conversation in lower-primary school (7 years), Norway |
| Fodstad and Vetnes (2021), Norwegian | Song lyrics, Poems | To examine what happens when students read and talk about (old) texts without being specifically introduced to their historical context beforehand. | Intertextual literacy, Structuralism, Literature teaching | Discourse analysis | An arena for involvement, participation, and engagement, and for exploring literary texts together | 2 student-led group conversations in upper-secondary school (17 years), Norway |
| Höglund and Rørbech (2021), English | Poems | To elaborate on how performativity can contribute to research on literature education. | Speech act, Performativity Post-humanity, Negotiation, Deconstruction | Theoretically driven | Not stated | 1 teacher-led whole-class conversation (Denmark) and 1 student-led group conversation (Finland) in lower-secondary school (12–15/14–15 years), |

| | | | | | | Denmark and Finland, respectively |
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| Kähkölä and Rättyä (2021), English | Poems | To examine the differences between dialogue-based student discussions and teacher-led conversations for the purpose of investigating if the languaging approach and collaborative dialogue can offer new teaching approaches for literature education. | Reception, Socio-cultural | Directed content analysis | An arena for developing their metacognitive understanding | 1 teacher-led and 1 student-led group conversation (2 groups) in lower-secondary school (13 years), Finland |
| Kvistad et al. (2021), Norwegian | Young-adult novels | To examine how students negotiate meaning in order to shed light on students' multifaceted meaning negotiations and discuss various understandings of exploratory talk/conversations. | Socio-cultural, Dialogic | Theoretically driven | An arena for engaging in text- relevant meaning negotiation | 3 student-led group conversations in upper-primary school (12–13 years), Norway |
| Rasmussen (2021), Danish | Picture books | To investigate how students create and maintain dialogic space during group conversations in literature education in upper-primary school. | Socio-cultural, Dialogic | Exploratory analysis | An arena for learning by joint interpretation and collaboration | 2 student-led group conversations in upper-primary school (11–12 years), Denmark |
| Skaftun and Sønneland (2021), English | Short stories | To investigate borderline cases of student engagement in literary conversations. | Socio-cultural, Dialogic, Engagement | Dialogic discourse analysis | An arena for choosing social and subject-specific positions | 1 student-led group conversation in lower-secondary school (14 years), Norway |
| Tysvær and Ottesen (2021), Norwegian | Picture books | To investigate if literary conversations about a picture book can be an exercise in understanding other people's lives, emotions, and needs. | Emotional literacy | Thematic analysis | An arena for developing literacy in general and emotional literacy in particular | 1 teacher-led whole-class conversation in lower-primary school (6 years), Norway |

| Walldén (2021), Swedish | Children's book | To explore the integration of reading and writing | New Literacy Studies, Literary criticism | Theoretically driven | An arena for combining meaning-making and text analyst practices | 2 librarian-led whole-class conversations in lower-primary school (9 years) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Andersson-Bakken et al. (2022), Norwegian | Picture books | To investigate how students' critical thinking is visible when they are working with literature. | Reception, Criteria for critical reading | Thematic analysis | An arena for developing critical literacy | 1 teacher-led whole-class conversation in lower-primary school (9 years), Norway |
| Hennig (2022), Norwegian | Young-adult novels | To investigate what ethical and moral presumptions and reflections (understood as literary proficiency) are voiced in students' talk. | Reception, Literature, Ethics, Dialogic | Theoretically driven | An arena for fostering every student's literary proficiency | 2 student-led group conversations in upper-primary school (1112 years), Norway |
| Malilang and Walldén (2022), English | Children's books | To investigate how students and a librarian respond to a book with dated values and how the response has various consequences, and to explore what opportunities for intertextual references are reflected in discussions. | Reception | Theoretically driven | An arena for joint negotiations in meaning-making processes | 2 librarian-led group conversations in lower-primary school (9 years), Sweden |
| Walldén (2022), English | Picture books | To investigate the opportunities offered by character-focused discussions for students' literary understanding. | Reception, Literary | Thematic content analysis | An arena for developing their literary understanding | 1 teacher-led whole-class conversation in upper-primary school (10 years), Sweden |

*a In this column, material from school context is included. Material from other contexts is excluded. Student age is given as reported in the respective publication. If the students' age is not specified, and only grade level is given, then we have converted this to the age the students are in the first calendar year of that grade (i.e., 6 years in Norwegian 1st grade, 7 years in Swedish 1st grade etc.).*

### 3.4 Pedagogical value and research interest

In this section, we will present the results of the investigation into the pedagogical value that the various studies in the corpus ascribe to literary conversations in an educational context. In many studies, that pedagogical value is explicitly stated; in others, it is inferred and hence relatively straightforward to identify. Further, some studies explicitly state that they explore the issue of pedagogical value (e.g., Ekvall & Skåve, 2014; Tengberg, 2009b). However, in some studies it is challenging to infer any pedagogical value, even where it is implied to some extent. Those studies are excluded from the discussion in this section, to avoid potential misinterpretation.

The analysis of the corpus yields an overall picture of how the pedagogical value of literary conversations is perceived, namely that conversations about literature are seen to constitute a space—or an arena—where students may participate as individuals, bringing with them their own experiences and using their own language, in communities where various purposes are fulfilled; the precise nature of those purposes will depend on the rationale for the literary conversation in each case. In the following, we will discuss these findings, using examples from the corpus to illustrate the various pedagogical justifications provided for the use of literary conversations.

One prominent justification—which may be self-explanatory—is that participation in the community is important in itself or for pedagogical purposes. A community may thus be either a valuable place in itself or a place where the result of collective work serves more individual purposes. Studies emphasizing the community as a valuable space in itself are typically interested in the conversations as a place for students' experiences and voices, proficiency, engagement, meaning-making, oracy, negotiation of proficiency, understandings, interpretations, thoughts, and reasoning, and also interested in the value of other people or the Other in such processes or in processes of problem-solving or inquiry. By contrast, in studies emphasizing the community as a place where collective work may serve as a prerequisite for the development of the individual, the focus is typically on various cognitive (and metacognitive) skills such as the development of reading skills, thinking, identity-building, and aesthetic understanding. Literary conversations are there considered a place where students may try out their thoughts, language, interpretations, and presumptions, or test their ideas about reality, and where they will encounter other people's languages, realities, and interpretations, which will nurture their own learning or development. To sum up, the community is considered either helpful or valuable to the individual student, or as a place where whatever happens can only happen there.

Further, the community is perceived as a place offering multiple opportunities for students' learning and development. Hence, the community is given a *pedagogical value* by the investigated studies. It is possible to classify the pedagogical values expressed in the various studies into four clusters associated with

different overarching goals, although it must be kept in mind that almost all studies argue for, or discover, more than one potential inherent in literary conversations. Those four goals are the following: (i) the development of literary understanding and proficiency; (ii) the development of language and communication; (iii) the development of critical thinking and problem-solving; and (iv) the development of social and emotional competences. Again, it needs to be added that every one of these terms has been given a range of meanings, depending on the various researchers' theoretical starting points.

The analysis of the studies in the corpus suggests that one of these potential values of literary conversations—the development of *literary understanding and proficiency*—is the predominant one. Some studies referred to this purpose as the main goal of literary conversations, stating for example that they represent an *arena to develop understanding of literature* (Rødnes, 2009) or an arena for *expressing literary proficiency* (Hennig, 2020a). Others included several purposes, for example *an arena [for students] to construe themselves as competent readers*, *involve themselves in literature instruction, and take responsibility for their own learning* (Asplund, 2012).

The pedagogical value ascribed to literary conversations must be considered in relation to the research interests and results of the individual studies, because the pedagogical values are implicitly or explicitly inherent as potentials in the research aims and/or questions, and then confirmed, nuanced, or rejected in light of the results. For example, most of the studies argue that the values concerned may be achieved if their findings are considered, included, or anticipated in educational practice. In short, they claim that these pedagogical values may be attained if the findings of the research are considered.

The close relationship between research interest and pedagogical value is evident, for example, in studies where the research aim is to investigate (sometimes among other things) the relationship between students and text or conversation and texts, and where the pedagogical value ascribed to the literary conversation is that it is a place offering an opportunity to develop a literary understanding and/or literary proficiency (e.g., Anderson & Hallesson, 2013; Hennig, 2020a; Rødnes, 2012; Ulland, 2016). Where the pedagogical value ascribed to the literary conversation is as a place for developing language and communication skills, there is typically a research interest in oral interpretation and subject-specific language (e.g., Høegh, 2012; Skaftun, 2020). Further, in studies where the value of the conversation is related to critical thinking and problem-solving, the aim tends to be to investigate how critical thinking and problem-solving—in the form of, for instance, exploration, negotiation, and engagement—unfold in the conversations (e.g., Andersson-Bakken et al., 2022; Sønneland, 2019). Finally, studies that foreground the educational value of literary conversation as an arena for the development of social and emotional competencies tend to investigate the manifestations of such competencies in the conversations (e.g., Asplund & Prieto, 2013; Nissen, 2020; Tysvær & Ottesen, 2021).

## 4.  DISCUSSION

The corpus of research studies identified and mapped out in this review represents a wide range of theoretical perspectives and methodological approaches as well as considerable variation in terms of the educational level where literary conversations take place and the genres of the texts that the conversations are about. Even so, one shortcoming in terms of representativity is the surprisingly small number of studies from Denmark.

By contrast, there were no surprises when it came to the theoretical perspectives preferred by the researchers, especially taking into account that the studies inventoried are all qualitative studies of human interaction with literature performed in an educational context for educational purposes. Interestingly, the preferred theoretical perspective taken illustrates a meeting place between traditional disciplines within the subject of literature and arts and educational theories. Further, these theories are intertwined and connected. If we consider this connection of theories together with the increased research interest for literary conversation, we may infer that the materialization, or even the manifestation of *literary/literature didactics* as a theoretical field is being settled in the Scandinavian context. This may again explain why the Scandinavian term literature/literary didactics as theoretical field, does not communicate very well within the broader international research community. This study might participate in expanding the dialogue between the Scandinavian research field and the broader community on this matter. Meanwhile, if the research interest within this theoretical field continues to increase and if Scandinavian research escalates the use of English as publication language, it should be possible for this theoretical field to both refine and grow, even outside the Scandinavian research community.

When it comes to the analysis of spoken material in the studies, there might be a need—even a requirement—to be more explicit about methodology. This is because a failure to be transparent about the analytical approach may give rise to critical questions and objections. The studies investigated often provide few analytical examples and very often from merely one conversation, even if several are included as material of investigation. The failure to be transparent about the fine-grained analytical approach then raises questions as to whether the excerpts exclusively serve as examples of predetermined pedagogical or theoretical persuasions. Following this, a methodological scarcity may also give rise to questions as to whether full account has been taken of the complexity of spoken interaction, for example with regard to intricacies of the meaning-making situation such as *ways of speaking* (intonation, laughter, double-voicing, body language, and facial expressions). If the analysis of spoken interactions is inadequate, the results obtained may be of limited value or even inaccurate. Against this background, there is an obvious need for further research into analytical approaches in the field.

Although the corpus manifests considerable variation in terms of the theoretical approaches and analytical methods used, the majority of it still mirrors values that

are prominent in the Scandinavian educational landscape. First, a belief that students will draw upon their everyday experiences and language when faced with subject-specific language and challenges in general, and with literary texts in particular, seems to underpin most of the studies. It might be claimed that there is an explicit or implicit reliance on core ideas in reader-response theory or other reception theories. This should not come as a surprise, since the very existence of an interest in students' conversations ought to be linked to such a belief. However, it is possible to imagine other kinds of motivations for looking at students' talk. For example, this could be done to form an opinion on their subject-specific knowledge both within the particular conversation, but also with an interest in how they develop over time. Many of the studies included in the present review do indeed take an interest in subject-specific language and competence, but this tends to be framed as an interest in the conversation as an arena for trying out and developing such proficiency, rather than as an arena for finding out what the students know and what they need to develop further. There are indeed very few studies that investigate students' development over time, concerning reading proficiency, literary understanding, language proficiency, communicational skills, and so forth. With regard to this, further research should be welcomed by the field.

Second, the research aims stated, the perspectives taken, and the pedagogical values discernible in the corpus all seem to us to reflect core values in Scandinavian L1 research and education. The corpus aligns well with the central cultural model regarding the purposes of literature education which is inherent in the formal curricula for the Scandinavian L1 subjects, namely that literature education "is a means to maintain and improve democratic society through the moulding and development of good citizens" (Gourvennec et al., 2020, p. 27). In addition, we also think they echo the values underpinning Aase's definition of the literary conversation as "a collective activity that is specific to literature instruction in school" (Aase, 2005, p. 106, our translation).

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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