

Chapter #21

IMPACT OF IDENTITY-ORIENTED LITERATURE EDUCATION ON ADOLESCENTS' LEARNING PRACTICES AND LEARNING OUTCOME

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ABSTRACT

A mixed-methods quasi-experimental study evaluated the effects of a pedagogical intervention in literature education on Austrian upper secondary high school students' insight into the self and the other. The intervention is based on the newly developed NDR-model, the letters in the abbreviation representing the basic practices of narration, dialogue and response underlying the model. Two cycles of NDR interventions on the identity issues of "happiness" and "relations" were implemented.

An IPA study was conducted to explore how the implementation of the NDR-model of literature education affected participants' learning practices (narration, dialogue, response) and learning outcomes (self-understanding and understanding of the other). Qualitative analysis of interview and artefact data suggested that NDR students' learning practices were promoted. Additionally, they experienced insight into the self and the other because they were stimulated to engage with literary texts in the context of their personal identities.

Keywords: literature education, scientific study of literature, narrative engagement, insight.

1. INTRODUCTION

Fialho, Zyngier, and Miall (2011) discovered that methods in language arts classes "ha[ve] not been subjected to much empirical research investigation and classroom interventions are generally taken for granted" although "the way classes are conducted can play a role relevant to students' responses to literature" (ibid., p. 237). The prevalent methods primarily aim at teaching students interpretation and formal analysis, thus distancing students from genuine literary experience (ibid.). Students do not perceive literature as a source of pleasure (Mahling, 2016) and reading as a personally significant process (Sumara, 2002). In addition, emotions and values constitutive of a meaningful reading process (Koopman & Hakemulder, 2015) are neglected in dominant approaches to literary education.

As literary education fails to encourage students to make literature significant by establishing personally relevant connections, the learning potential of fictional narratives to intersect with and build upon the learners' lives is not fully realized.

The implementation of the NDR-model primarily aims to improve students' narrative engagement and self-insight, trigger meaningful literary response and foster accommodative and transformative learning (Illeris, 2017). The model is termed NDR-model because of the basic practices elicited by the model. Narration (Goodson & Gill, 2011; Goodson, Biesta, G., Tedder, & Adai, 2010), dialogue (Wilkinson, Soter, & Murphy, 2010; Alexander, 2020; Resnick, Michaels, & O'Connor, 2010) and response

(Sumara, 2002; Rosenblatt, 1994; Iser, 1978; Kuiken, Miall, & Sikora, 2004) are the key activities triggered by the model.

The NDR-model comprises six phases. In phase one, students are supposed to tell autobiographical narratives (Ricoeur, 1991, 1992; McAdams & McLean, 2013). Students are asked to perform narratives in interaction in step two (Bamberg, 2011; Bamberg & Georgakopoulou, 2008). Based on Kuiken's and Miall's approach (2001), students personally comment on the literary text by applying the *self-probed retrospection technique* in step three. In step four, text teams analyze the text in its context and interpret it (close reading: Bears & Probst, 2013; wide reading: Baßler, 2005, Hallet, 2008). In the following phase, diverse analyses and interpretations as well as personal insights are discussed (Thein, Beach, & Johnston, 2017; Wilkinson et al., 2010). Step six requires students to carry out a personal project on one aspect of the given identity issue (Johnston, 2014; Sumara, 2002; Spinner, 2001). Finally, the narrative from step one is reflected in the light of new literary knowledge and reading experiences and possibly reconstructed.

In the given intervention, two cycles of the NDR-model based on the identity issues of 'happiness' and 'relations' were implemented.

The present study addresses the following research question:

RQ: *How does the pedagogic intervention on the basis of the NDR-model of literary education affect participants' learning practices (narration, dialogue, response) and learning outcomes (self-understanding and understanding of the other)?*

2. METHODS

A quasi-experimental mixed methods design was implemented (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018) in which the qualitative data are supposed to explain significant results from the quantitative analysis in an explanatory sequential design.

In order to be able to generate a detailed description of the phenomenon in question and to prevent data overload, sample size for this study was small ($N = 70$; seventh-form grammar school students). For the qualitative study, stratified purposive sampling (Teddlie & Tashkkori, 2009) on the basis of the results from the quantitative study was used. The participants were selected on the basis on their scores on reading orientations, reading experiences and self-insight in the pretest. A limited number of students within the experimental group took part in the qualitative study ($n = 6$).

To collect the quantitative data, self-report five-point Likert scales were used. To measure reading orientations, the Empathy and Insight scales from the Literary Response Questionnaire (LRQ, Miall & Kuiken, 1995) were adopted. Qualitative attentional focus was quantified on the Narrative Presence subscale from the Narrative Engagement Scale (NES, Busselle & Bilandzic, 2009). Two forms of absorbing reading engagement were measured by means of the Absorption-like States Questionnaire (ASQ; Kuiken & Douglas, 2017). The Self-perceptual Depth subscale from the Experiencing Questionnaire (EQ; Kuiken, Campbell, & Sopcak, 2012) was included in the questionnaire to collect data on self-insight. Pretests were administered to experimental and control groups before the start of the intervention, posttests after completion of the intervention.

In order to tackle the question if there is a statistically significant change in participants' reading orientations, attentional focus, narrative engagement and self-insight after the pedagogical intervention, a Wilcoxon Signed Rank test was conducted. A Mann-Whitney U test investigated the question if there is a statistically significant difference in literary response scores (reading orientations, attentional focus, self-other relations, verisimilitude, self-insight) between participants of the experimental group

(implementation of the NDR-model) and participants of the control group (no implementation of the NDR-model).

The qualitative study was conducted within the framework of Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA; Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009) because this methodology allows us to gain a detailed personal insight into participants' experiences and their interpretations of these experiences. In line with the theoretical underpinnings of IPA, the qualitative study pursued two purposes: (a) to phenomenologically explore participants' descriptions of their experiences of literature education, (b) to hermeneutically understand how the intervention affects the participants' learning outcomes.

To collect qualitative data, individual face-to-face semi-structured interviews were conducted in a receptive style (Wengraf, 2001). A semi-structured interview protocol containing open-ended questions to encourage detailed responses was used. The questions focused on (a) the general description of the experience, (b) the personal relevance of the experience, (c) engagement and agency during the experience, and (d) the detailed description of the learning experience. The interviews were audiotaped and transcribed verbatim. In addition, participants produced experiential reports and artefacts. Discussion were videotaped and transcribed verbatim. All the data were anonymized and treated confidentially. Informed consent was obtained in written form from each participant prior to the implementation of the intervention.

In accordance with the principles of IPA, the following strategies of data analysis were applied to the qualitative data in an iterative cycle until thematic saturation was reached: a. reading and rereading, b. initial noting, c. developing emergent themes, d. searching for connections across emergent themes, e. moving to the next case, f. looking for patterns across cases (Smith et al., 2009). Finally, the data are presented in a coherent narrative format, citations from the data are supposed to illustrate each theme.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

First, the Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test revealed statistically significant changes in reading orientations, attentional focus, narrative engagement and self-insight following participation in the educational intervention. In addition, the results of the Mann-Whitney U Test indicated that there was a statistically significant difference in reading orientations, attentional focus, narrative engagement and self-insight between the experimental group and the control group after completion of the intervention. (Grandits, 2021).

Second, four main themes were identified in the qualitative analysis of interviews, artefacts and observations. Participants described their experiences of how the intervention affected: (a) engagement; (b) learning practices; (c) self-insight; and (d) insight into the other.

Theme 1: Engagement

This theme covers how the students experienced their engagement with the learning content during the intervention. Intensity, balance between guidance and freedom, and personal connections make up the key aspects to engagement.

All participants perceived themselves as highly agentive during the intervention. Compared to regular lessons, the intervention was regarded as "more thorough" (Mary), "more active" (Bea), "more real" (Sarah), and more intensive:

What surprised me was that we dealt with the book once again because usually it is like this: We read a book, then the teacher asks questions, and this is it. And, yes,

..., this time we dealt with the book again and again, and actually I found this good because we could deal with the book more intensively. (Bob)

In addition, participants repeatedly described engagement during the intervention as balance between teacher's guidance and students' freedom:

Teachers regulated the process, but we could work much more independently because of the tasks, we could bring in our own stuff or voice our own opinions. That's what I experienced. (Mae)

Bea reported that students were given "ample scope" although they had to work on assignments, and Mary stated that the process "was guided, but you still had your freedom". Bob used a very similar formulation: "On the one hand we were guided so that you hand in everything on time, but on the other hand, I think, you were free to contribute all your ideas to the group, that gave you some freedom."

As far as text response is concerned, students experienced the engagement with the text as transaction between themselves and the text (Rosenblatt, 1994). They could personally relate to the text during the lessons:

[In regular literature education] we read the book and got a question and then we forgot about it. And now we engaged much more with it, and I think it was more relevant to students, so that we could make a better connection, and that was why I enjoyed it more, yes. (Bea)

Thorough engagement with the text resulted in a connection between the world of the text and the world of the reader, which in turn established personal relevance. Mary added that "you like books better if you can connect to them personally, mostly, and you understand them more easily because of that, yes, as I said, it was the connection with yourself, to some degree, this was very good". According to Mary's interpretation, understanding of the text was fostered by the personal connection with the text. Students could also link up their behavior to the characters' actions in the text. This was mainly triggered by phase three of the intervention in which students picked three passages and "always had a personal connection to it [the text], and this was thought-provoking." (Mary). Mae gave reasons why phase three was crucial in establishing personal relations with the text: (a) The texts addressed relevant identity issues that had been explored in phases one and two before. (b) This kind of task was transactional in nature, it required students to actively bring in their associations and memories.

In conclusion, participants perceived activity as intensive, they conceptualized agency as dialectic of freedom and guidance and interpreted engagement with the text as transactional relationship between the world of the text and the world of the reader which mediated learning effects.

Theme 2: Learning practices

This theme covers the development of the skills of narrating, engaging in dialogue and responding to literary texts.

It can be concluded from participants' interviews and artefacts that the intervention fostered skills learning. First, response learning was promoted by close reading activities in phase four. Due to in-depth discussions of the process of analysis and analysis results in the group, students reported an improvement of their competence in formal analysis. In addition, deep reflection on the transactional relationship enabled them to put forward more plausible hypothesis that could be supported by quotes from the literary text. Phase three was considered most helpful for interpretation: "You see the text in a different light because you divide it into sections and then you again have a different perspective on the text, I think that helped a lot." (Bea) In sum, participants found selecting relevant passages

from the text and connecting them to the world of reader facilitated the formulation of interpretation hypothesis. Only Mae reported that she did not improve her analysis and interpretation skills.

Second, narrating a personal story was conceived as beneficial for skills learning. Sarah reported a progress in narration. Judith explained that the intervention promoted narrative learning: "I have never done such stories at school before. It was actually the first time we had to tell a personal story, and it helped me on because it was the first time." The novelty of the approach offered new opportunities for learning. For instance, Mae outlined how phase one supported her to perform better at school:

[...] I had never found it easy to write a story, and last year writing was very difficult for me. [...] And maybe this was the incentive to put more effort into it, that I manage German better. [...] And I think it was really good to start out with this task so that we could express our emotions, yes, I think this was really good.
(Mae)

Third, dialogic skills were fostered during the intervention: "[...] and I also think that they [dialogic skills] were trained because we dealt with discussion rules right in the beginning, that you let others finish, and that you should consider different perspectives, and that, I think this brought me a step forward." (Judith). All participants agreed that the capability of comparing differences was increased. Recapitulation of the essences of the learning process and outcome was experienced as valuable in dialogic learning.

In conclusion, participants reported that they could develop their skills of narration, dialogue and response. Skills learning was associated with intensive engagement.

Theme 3: Insight into the self

Participants distinguished between five effects of the intervention on identity learning. Students' interpretations of the effects on their (a) traits and behavior, (b) attitudes to life, (c) psychological well-being, (d) storied lives, (e) perception of time, and (f) identities as readers and learners will be outlined below.

Bob stated that you could "learn something for yourself, in most cases". In the following, we will present what students reported about the learning outcome. First, the intervention prompted self-assessment. Students pondered about their action patterns and their character traits as a result of the transaction with the literary text. As a consequence, they discerned a change in behavior and character traits: "[...] I try to partly improve my behavior and my qualities or I simply do not push my negative qualities aside, but I rather really reflect on them, and I consider various perspectives." (Sarah) Reflection raised the awareness for the need of change and self-care: "This clearly showed me that I need to change a bit and that I need to take more care of myself." (Sarah)

Self-assessment also impacted on how students valued their lives. By comparing the tragic life stories of characters with their own stories, they understood the true value of their lives: "It [the intervention] evoked good things, yes, that I'm simply happy with my life as it is." (Sarah)

Second, participants pictured the intervention as transformative as far as their attitudes to life are concerned. These were modified and therefore students gained self-insight:

What did I learn? This is hard to tell, but, I have already mentioned it, concerning happiness, find out what really makes you happy, don't be superficial. Now, personally it was a big advantage for me. (Mary)

Students achieved self-insight by feeling into themselves. This was prompted by the authentic questions posed during the intervention, e.g. 'What makes you truly happy?'. This kind of self-insight had effects on participants' actions: "[...] and maybe I'll do some things

or won't do them in the future so that I'm happier, yes, this really made me thinking very much, and, I think, this also influenced me, yes." (Mary). Bob had a similar experience:

Yes, in this text about happiness, there were two characters who had a lot of problems, but the ending still was like, ehm, 'Yes, we are fine!' And then I thought for myself, yes, whatever harm happens to me, in the end everything will be alright, and that's what I learned. (Bob)

Bob's attitude to life changed, he grew more optimistic because of the transaction with the literary text: "Yes, I'm a somewhat pessimistic person as far as my future is concerned, but what I've maybe learnt from the tasks is that I should be hopeful for the future whatever happens."

Third, the intervention also affected the psychological well-being of the participants. Narration enabled the participants to cope with sad events, thus changing their lives. Judith found the writing of the autobiographical story transformative:

No, not depressing because I don't have a problem to tell people about negative events, but I found the task hard when I did it at home, I found it really difficult to write about it or it took me quite long because I needed breaks all the time. But I have benefitted, I feel better when I think about it now. [...] Telling the personal story, the self-experience, it really helped me, I can cope with it now, it was like a therapy. (Judith)

Other students confirmed this purging effect: "For me, it was very important to write the story in the beginning, that sad experience that I had, in order to come to terms with it." (Mae) Mary highlighted the consequences of the disclosure of repressed life episodes: "[...] that you are thankful in the first place, that it doesn't come to that anymore, and, that you'll maybe change your behavior because of it."

Fourth, participants experienced an effect on their personal life stories. Past events were recalled and reflected when students told their personal stories: "[...] It [the past] was called to mind and I could think about it once more." (Bea) Disturbing memories were revived in the present, they aroused feelings and had future implications on students' behavior. For example, Sarah realized through the identity task that she had been too submissive in the past, she disapproved of her behavior and decided to change it. She stated that it was the intervention that "made me realize my past, and where I went wrong and what I could have done better". Recall of the relevant episodes of the life story also gave participants the opportunity to account for how they acted in the past.

In addition, the evocation of memories raised participants' awareness of the fact that past experiences shaped their present being. This awareness was regarded beneficial for the future as life was perceived less superficially.

Fifth, students also reported an influence on their time perception, they became aware of the temporality of their being. They realized that time perception was closely linked to their storied lives. When telling their personal stories, the past was reflected in the present, and this present reflection provided students with additional future opportunities. Past memories were evoked during the present transactional engagement: "Yes, I realized what I had experienced in my short life, [...] and, yes, I found it nice that I could account for the past yet again, from childhood till now, so that you can recall the past." (Judith) Participants experienced the effect that the temporal distance between past and present was bridged during the process of remembering, discontinuities were overcome. In addition to personal memories, cultural experiences of the past were recalled in the intertextual reading of the literary texts.

The present experience that the students linked up with their past had implications for the future. Participants explained that a changed attitude to life, which had become apparent in new life concepts, shaped their perception of the future. Bea discovered that she had a different perspective on problems although having read the book did not help her solve the

problem. Mary realized that the intervention had offered her future possibilities for action. She was taught that she was agentive and that she could change her behavior. Awareness of the past made Sarah recognize the need for change.

Sixth, the intervention also changed the participants' identities as readers. Bea stated that she had not been interested in reading before the intervention, but as a result of the intensive engagement with the literary text she was enjoying reading then. Therefore, she identified the future objective of adopting a new reading attitude. In addition, modified orientations to reading were reported: "I think I would read the book with a different attitude now." (Mary) Judith adopted a new approach to reading which was grounded in perseverance. She had realized that high engagement was essential for the learning outcome. We can conclude that intensive engagement could facilitate a change in reading orientations. Mae also noticed a better overall performance at school because of the change in reading attitude.

Participants also remarked on the insight into the self on the meta level. Emotional resistance was regarded a precondition for change. Learning was experienced as transformative: traits, actions, attitudes, psychological condition, life stories and habits were changed due to the intervention. Although they answered the question in the negative whether the intervention fundamentally changed them as a person, participants reported changes in self-understanding, in their psychological condition, in their storied lives, in their perception of time, and their identities as readers and learners. They actively increased their capacity to rethink life. In the discussions, participants additionally mentioned changes in their relational identities.

Participants agreed that the reported changes could be traced back to the intervention. No other factors were detected. Moreover, students repeatedly stated in their experiential reports that were written three months after the intervention that the lessons had a lingering effect. The ideas triggered by the intervention had stayed with them by then. Students also highlighted a better retention of the learning outcome. Sarah concluded in her report that students gained a lot of new insights about themselves, they got to know literature better, they got to know their classmates better, and they escaped the daily school routine. Despite their spontaneous negative answers to the question whether fundamental changes had taken place, we can infer from the interviews, artefacts and observations that transformative learning occurred as an effect of the intervention.

Theme 4: Insight into the other

Mae's description of how participants experienced the insight into the relationships with others is representative: "I don't know, I just think I will treat people differently than before." Bob, for instance, decided to respond to significant Others in a more friendly way because he had learned to empathize with characters during the intervention. Mary expounded on the insight into the other:

It was very interesting, I think, to get to know close people better once again, and I think that the question what people think about happiness is very interesting though very personal. If people tell a story ... what really makes them happy, and, as I said, that really influenced me. First, how I see these people, and second, how I treat them, and, what I maybe want to do to make others happy. (Mary)

Insight of the other was yielded by listening to significant Others telling their personal stories. Identity work in phases one and two influenced the participants' perception of others, their response to others as well as the actions towards others. Changes in students' perception of their relations could be partly traced back to a change of life concepts. Affective behavior towards others was also altered. Mae, for instance, acted more emotionally expressive towards others after the intervention.

A further effect on the insight into the other was that people were evaluated differently: "In any case, I'll be able to judge people differently from what I thought before" (Judith). Higher tolerance for others was shown, participants had become more unwilling to change others and interfere with others' beliefs: "Yes, well, I'll try to let people be the way they are, and I'll try not to think ill of them somehow. [...] Everybody can decide for themselves, and, it doesn't concern me. And, I think, I've learned this only recently." (Judith). In conclusion, general insight into human nature was reported. Others were perceived and judged differently, and as a consequence, actions towards the others changed.

Adopting different views was considered a means to insight into the other: "It was interesting that, I've said this before, that there were different opinions, and that you allow these different opinions, and that you change your own opinion a bit or that you can rethink things, yes." (Mary) Acceptance of alternative views was facilitated by putting yourself in the other's position: "It made me clear that I had to see things from different perspectives because I think, well, I tried this before, but through it [the intervention] you got a much better picture of it, you see things differently." (Sarah). To sum up, participants reported a better understanding of the other through the change of perspective.

The intervention also had ethical implications. First, students reconsidered ethical norms:

"Well, I wouldn't draw a clear line between good and evil anymore because there are people who somehow seem, well, not bad, but nasty, but there is a reason why they are that way, and therefore I wouldn't divide people simply in two groups, in good and evil, but you have to question these categories." (Judith)

Ethical reflection of that kind was caused by a thorough analysis of characters' traits and reasons for their actions. Students held that both the text's structure and the intensive engagement with the text provoked ethical thinking.

In addition, participants discovered the harmful nature of prejudices. They also felt a moral obligation to voice their own opinions and to defend their opinions, but also to scrutinize others' opinions and to accept them.

In conclusion, participants reported a change in perceptions and evaluations of significant Others and in actions towards these significant Others. Identity work and the transactions in personal response to the literary text were seen as causing these changes. In addition, different views in external dialogues facilitated insight into the Other. Finally, the intervention did not only affect personal relationships. Ethical knowledge about norms, obligations and imperatives was generated as well.

4. CONCLUSION

It can be concluded from the qualitative results that the intervention based on the NDR-model affected the participants' learning practices (narration, dialogue, response) and learning outcome (self-insight, insight into the other).

Engagement during the intervention was described as intensive. Students experienced the lessons as a balance between teacher's guidance and students' freedom. Making personal connections was interpreted as a form of engagement that promoted the learning outcome.

Furthermore, the intervention fostered the skills of narrating life story episodes, enacting dialogue and responding to the literary text. First, participants learned how to coherently tell and retell personal stories. In addition, they realized how cultural scripts influenced the configuration of their stories. Second, students developed their dialogic skills in the given community of practice. Especially exploratory talk and elaborated

explanations (Wilkinson et al., 2010) were promoted. Dialogue in the literature classroom fulfilled three essential functions: It was deliberative as participants learned to discuss different views, it was cumulative as they collaboratively built up knowledge and experience, and it was mediating as it allowed transactions between student and student and student and text (Alexander, 2020). Third, forms of response to literary text were furthered. Students developed their capacities to experience and analyze texts. On the one hand, they learned how to make associations between the plot and personal memories and how to fuse with characters. On the other hand, they acquired the skill of contextualizing texts which enabled them to put forward more plausible interpretation hypotheses.

Participants did not only improve learning practices, skill development also affected insight into the Self, and insight into the Other. Students constructed identities by practicing identities. They wrote, read and listened to identities and thus redid their own identities. Practices thus caused transformative identity learning. Experiential reading also had a revelatory effect on the readers, hidden aspects of their personalities were disclosed. In addition, higher-level thinking, especially reflection, recapitulation and deep understanding were triggered by the intervention. Participants also reported higher accountability due to the practices they adopted.

There is empirical evidence for the insight into the self that was effectuated by the intervention. To begin with, the intervention enabled the participants to aesthetically experience the literary text during reading. Analysis of the qualitative data suggests that aesthetic experience is a precondition for insight into the self. In the literature, the following effects of reading literary texts on identity are postulated. First, knowledge about identity is discussed and performatively produced (Krammer, 2013). Participants reflected and co-reflected on their traits, their behavior, their attitudes to life, their habits, and their storied lives in response to reading literary texts, and by reflecting identity, they generated new knowledge about identity. Second, reading literature has the potential of transforming the reader's identity (Ricoeur, 1991). Behavior, attitudes, psychological condition, personal stories, time perception, and identity as readers and learners were changed due to the intervention. Third, literature affects personal identity in its temporal dimension (Ricoeur, 1992). The students experienced themselves in their temporality. They realized how past, present and future are interrelated. New possibilities of agency were opened up by learning how to apply the learning outcome to personal life. In addition, participants realized that the personal story could provide continuity. Narrative change and consolidation were experienced as indicators of development. Fourth, literature affects social identity negotiations in situated contexts (Beach, Johnston, & Thein, 2015). Dialogue allowed insight into how identity was conditioned by relationships to significant Others. Thus, both understanding of the self and the other was enhanced. Fifth, literature emphasizes the ontological status of identity as cultural fiction (Krammer, 2013). Participants' recalled and reflected their storied lives, thus becoming aware of the fictional nature of the story and the selective mechanism that generates the story.

The qualitative study also proved that the intervention yielded insight into the other. Changes in the perception and evaluation of others and in the actions towards others were evident. In addition, ethical norms that regulate social living together were reconsidered.

In conclusion, the intervention based on the NDR-model is purposeful as it met the principal learning objectives set out at the beginning of the design process. First, engagement with the text was enhanced, thus promoting the practices of narrating, engaging in dialogue, and responding to literary texts. Second, the intervention fostered students' learning about themselves and others.

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