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Teaching Poetry in Upper Secondary School Courses

A Study in Lesson Design

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Abstract

This study attempts to show benefits with different methods when teaching poetry in Upper Secondary courses, with the aim of proving that by using a certain design of the lesson, it is possible to engage the students in English poetry. A secondary aim was to incorporate and implement the theories on sociocultural learning by Vygotsky into the method used in the study. Finally, the study aimed to question the definitions of what constitutes a poem and the ideas of canonized versus non-canonical material within literature. The method chosen for this study was a mixed methods design, and the study applied a deductive approach where a hypothesis based on previous research and ideas within the field was tested. The design of the study was to perform a focus group interview, followed by observations of four lessons with students at Upper Secondary level, and finally a questionnaire for the students. The results from the study were mainly positive and the questionnaire showed that most of the students appreciated the first part the most, although a few students enjoyed both parts. The combined results showed that the design has an impact when it comes to engagement, and it changed a few of the students’ views on poetry. The main finding in the study was that students prefer less complex poetry that does not belong to the canon, since most of the students marked the first part as the best one. The results showed therefore that the design has an impact when it comes to engagement.

Keywords: Didactics, Poetry, Vygotsky, Upper Secondary school
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1. Introduction

Teachers have a mission to fulfil; to open the door which leads to knowledge for their students. Then another step is required; to make the students interested in discovering poetry. This could be said for all elements in second language teaching but when it comes to the 'poetry door', if one may put it like that, it could be extra tricky to make the students step over that threshold. So, the key is to engage in order to reach all of those students that will pass through one's classroom. The reward that comes with achieving this task is plentiful; they could discover new thoughts and horizons, learn about their identity, get a glimpse of history through another form of literature and unconsciously improve their target language in the process. Jeremy Harmer stresses the element of engaging students in Upper Secondary courses and how this sparks other benefits; "Teenagers, if they are engaged, have a great capacity to learn, a great potential for creativity, and a passionate commitment to things which interest them" (39). Elaine Showalter explains how poetry is like a gold-mine: “Teaching poetry offers the literature instructor some of the most fundamental, immediate, active, even physical ways to engage students in learning” (62). Therefore, we as teachers need to make the lessons as interesting as possible.

However, there are hurdles that the teacher needs to overcome or work around. One of those are the fact that you need your students to be engaged in the task. Another is how your students regard poetry and what types of connotations are connected to it socially and culturally. Brian Parkinson & Helen Reid Thomas write about two examples of students who feel intimidated by poetry and the study of poetry. The first is a Swedish student with this view; "... in his country poetry was upper class and he was working class, ...” (53). The second is a French student who has narrowed down her knowledge to older poetry in her own language and she was writing her own poems but in an old-fashioned style. This caused her to resist poetry from recent centuries and modern linguistic analysis. Elaine Showalter also brings up the fact that teachers experience hardships with teaching literature and poetry; “Teachers lament that students find it difficult and intimidating” (62). Finally, students are more familiar with novels and short stories since they usually have a limited experience and knowledge of poems, usually due to the fact that teachers in the previous grades might have only touched upon this form within literature (Parkinson & Reid Thomas 53).

If one discovers the benefits that poetry has as a teacher, one will have a huge source of various material to bring into one's classroom. The content within this smaller format in
comparison to other material used in TL teaching could hold immense feelings and philosophical questioning. As Joanne Collie & Stephen Slater explain about the contents in poems; "... they often explore themes of universal concern and embody life experiences, observations and the feelings evoked by them" (226). And according to Richard Beach et al., literature and poetry can function as a gate for young adults into discovering their identity and place in the world; "... teachers can use literature as a means of welcoming students' identities and interests into the classroom. This is especially true of poetry" (160). However, there is a lot that is demanded from the teacher and we only have a few seconds to catch their interest. According to Kenneth Koch, the teacher should try to “… connect the poem to the children’s feelings…” and present them in a way that “… would immediately make it interesting…” (introduction xxxviii) for the students. The importance of tuning into that interest and how this leads to beneficial consequences is also stressed by Elaine Showalter; “… and when students are interested in the material, they will learn under any circumstances” (19). This, I believe, is a recipe for getting engaged students in class when working with poetry, or even literature for that sake.

From a linguistic standpoint the poetry as a format has benefits as a deeper understanding of the language, grammatical features and lexis, intonation and stress, listening for the rhythm and words that sound similar (phonetics). In a sense, one will teach grammar, pronunciation, dialectal differences under the disguise of an emotionally moving literary contribution. Also, by addressing this smaller format the teachers will have time to let the students do a close reading of the poem and searching for clues when analysing (Beach et al. 170).

What then, is considered to be a poem? The word stems from the Latin word *poema* which comes from the Greek word *poēma* meaning ‘make’. In *The Concise Oxford Dictionary*; ninth edition, the word is explained in two ways: “1 a metrical composition, usu. concerned with feeling or imaginative description. 2 an elevated composition in verse or prose”. According to this definition, a poem should be a composition that someone makes that can hold a content on feelings or imagination and have either a strict or a freer structure. But do we easily recognize poems? Could only one line be defined as a poem? Collie & Slater states that students are sometimes confused about the forms of a poem; "One question which is often thrown up in the course of these activities concerns the poetic qualities, ... Is it really a poem? And if so, what exactly makes it one?... " (243). One wonders then if teachers know - what is defined as a poem and which qualities is it that makes it a poem? In this study, a range of different ‘poems’ will be used, where the definition of what constitutes a poem will be
challenged.

Another factor that will have an impact on the teacher’s selection and how we value and define material, is that we have a division between canonized versus non-canonized material in literature, and poetry being a part of our literature heritage, thus the division is present there as well. But how would one define canon? One excellent explanation of the term is given by Parkinson & Reid Thomas: "The term 'canon' comes from the classical Greek word for a measuring rod and could also mean a list" (25). As with the selection and discarding of texts at the meeting in Nicaea in the year 325, where they decided upon which texts should be included in the Bible, there is a measuring of the material at hand and whether or not it holds a place within the canon or if it according to the people in authority does not fulfil the demands. Therefore, a lot more lies underneath the notion of canon;” ... a canon of literature carries implications both of value and of some kind of official or publicly constituted authority” (Parkinson & Reid Thomas 25).

1.1. Aim and hypothesis

This study will attempt to show benefits with different methods and the design of the lesson when teaching poetry in Upper Secondary courses. The aim is to prove the following: that by using a certain lesson design, it is possible to engage the students in English poetry. The secondary aim of the study is to incorporate and implement the theories on sociocultural learning by Vygotsky into the method used in the study, in order to find results that will corroborate its benefits. Finally, the study will as a complement to the hypothesis, attempt to question the definitions of what constitutes a poem and the ideas of canonized versus non-canonized poetry with its implications respectively. The hypothesis that this study will aim to prove is that the design of the lesson, with regards to methods, will affect how students in Upper Secondary School engage in English poetry.
2. Background

2.1. Previous research within pedagogy and didactics

The most dominant branch within pedagogy and didactics was initially Behaviourism which originated from an experiment by Watson & Raynor (1920). The ideas of the stimulus, the response and the reinforcement was transferred into the studies of learning new languages by Skinner (1957). A few years later another contender, Chomsky (1959) entered the field and criticized these ideas, believing that what we learn is processed in a more complex way together with the fact that sometimes learners show knowledge about language that they have not been taught yet. In 1990s these ideas were further developed by Pinker (1994) who introduced the notion of a universal grammar, where everyone is born with a general knowledge regarding grammar and structure (Harmer 68-69).

In the 1970s and the 1980s, new ideas regarding teaching arrived (Illich 1972, Krashen 1985, Allwright 1988). Old ways of teaching should be put aside in favour of a more pragmatic approach where students learn by being exposed to real life situations where the language has to be used in order to solve the task. Students will then learn unconsciously. There is also a need for relaxed students with a positive attitude according to Stephen Krashen. This must be achieved by the teacher, together with the aim that students should feel unthreatened in their learning environment. The students’ affective filter is then lowered and the comprehensible input will have a free passage into their minds. Following these ideas, a theory of noticing appeared (Lewis 1986, Batstone 1994). By showing the students material and then leaving them to make out the pattern for themselves, they will establish this newly acquired knowledge. "The things we discover for ourselves are absorbed more effectively than things we are taught" (Harmer 75).

A new field called New Literacy studies appeared in the 1980s and 1990s, where Street (1995) and Gee (2012) showed an approach that sees learning and literacy as "…socially embedded practices rather than discrete skills…” (Beach et al. 5). Rowsell (2012) stated that this theory “…is particularly useful for teachers in highlighting how students’ literacy practices, including their engagements with literature, are deeply connected to identity issues, felt emotions, lived cultural practices, as well as linking local and global concerns” (Beach et al. 6). Furthermore in the 1990s, two researchers: Cole (1996) and Willis (1996),
criticized the instrumental learning of grammatical skills with repetition since the acquisition could not be proven to have the affect wanted (Harmer 71).

2.2 Didactical theories, approaches and methods (why, what, how)

Why do we teach literature? How do we as teachers list the reasons and motivate our students in this area? Elaine Showalter explains how the reasons used to be to educate students so that they in the future became better citizens in society, but there is now a multiple range of reasons for why we should teach literature (22).

One reason is that the students will learn about various cultures with the aid of literature. The reader can imagine how life was like in the past when literature and poetry from an English-speaking country and time-period is represented. Literature from all around the English-speaking world "... can none the less incorporate a great deal of cultural information" (Collie & Slater 4).

Another reason is that we expose students to the ‘real thing’. In other contexts and in designed textbooks, the language has been modified for the students’ present level. Although the semantics of poetry in the English language can be demanding, it could be regarded as a complement and a counterpoise to the language used in the rest of the course. So, literature and poetry that is kept in its truest form is according to Collie & Slater an authentic experience for an L2 learner; "Learners are thus exposed to language that is as genuine and undistorted as can be managed in the classroom context" (3). On the other hand, using difficult language in class requires an effort from the students and a well-thought out selection of works by the teacher. The reward is that when the students are engaged, they sort of forget that they are studying a foreign language and become lost in the story. "Engaging imaginatively with literature enables learners to shift the focus of their attention beyond the more mechanical aspects of the foreign language system" (Collie & Slater 5). They want to learn more about the characters, find out what is happening regarding the plot and become emotionally involved in the story. The students can also share the emotions that certain characters experience.

Finally, literature will teach students about life in general and all the elements that come with being human. The knowledge that comes from these studies will be useful tools both in school, but also outside this realm; “..., all of us who teach literature believe that it is
important not only in education but in life“ (Showalter 24).

However, the reasons for teaching literature and poetry could differ from one teacher to another, but according to Beach et. al. teachers need to evaluate why they are doing what they are doing when teaching literature; "You will ultimately need to formulate your own sense of purpose and theories of teaching literature as a means of making decisions about what kinds of texts you select, how you will foster student participation ... Your beliefs about what kinds of literature to teach ... "(4). Therefore, the teacher needs to ponder about material after the reasons have been clarified. Then, how do we make that selection? We should not take this task too lightly since "... our decisions as educators reflect our theoretical orientations and beliefs about the ultimate purpose for teaching literature" (Beach et al. 8).

And what poems we as teachers select have a great impact on the outcome. Several interests should be adhered to when the teacher selects the material. These are for example; the type of group, the students’ needs, their present level in the language and their cultural background. Secondly, one strives for material that engages students. Something they can relate to and be stimulated emotionally by. The material has to be meaningful and relevant for the students (Collie & Slater 6). Jeremy Harmer also argues for how the material as a factor controls student involvement and engagement; "Our job, therefore, must be to provoke student engagement with material which is relevant and involving" (39). The poems which we can choose from are plentiful if one broadens the definition of what constitutes a ‘real’ poem. Kenneth Koch states that when it comes to the selection of material it is beneficial for young adults to be introduced to a variety of poets, from the seventeenth-century up to the twenty-first-century (introduction xxxi). The selection must also be regarded in steps where we expose the students for more easy tasks and then move into more difficult parts as Showalter argues: “..., students must begin with the familiar and emotionally relevant, and move from there to more complex forms and historically-distant works” (64).

Another way of selecting is to involve the students in the decision. A questionnaire where they fill in their interests and tastes in literature, together with a brief summary of a few titles which they then have to vote on, where the title with the most votes will be selected (Collie & Slater 7). Every student has various experiences and previous knowledge that they bring into class and they need to be regarded as individuals with a set of “…different needs, competences, and cognitive skills...” (Harmer 37). This difference between the individuals should be celebrated and encouraged by the teacher so that the students can "... respond to texts and situations with their own thoughts and experience, rather than just by answering questions and doing abstract learning activities" (Harmer 39). The aim must be to lift the
students’ thoughts and ideas in order to build their confidence and equip them for situations in their future lives.

Furthermore, one has to face the question of material belonging to the literary canon compared to material that can be found in the outer rims. There is a distinct level in class regarding these two groups, where the material belonging to the canon usually holds a higher status among peers, "... certain poets deemed canonical or worthy of study" (Beach et al. 155). If the teacher seldom brings poetry into the classroom, it is more likely that the lesson will be focused on material belonging to canon or with tests in mind; "... - but only poetry from traditions that are accounted for in the inherited curriculum, or approaches to analysing poems that are included on benchmark exams" (Beach et al. 154). It requires teachers that are comfortable with the form and design of lessons in poetry, for them to risk doing more untraditional poetry such as songs from the hip-hop culture. On the subject of songs as poetry material, Showalter explains how song lyrics could act as an entrance to more advanced material; “Many teachers invite students to use lyrics of popular songs as a way of getting started on poetic language; some textbooks and handbooks actually include lyrics like Bob Dylan’s “Highway 61 Revisited”, and invite students to compare it to poems like Yeats’s “Easter 1916”” (74). It is therefore a need for a continuum regarding poetry when it comes to teaching Upper Secondary students.

The division in literature between material belonging to canon and respectively material belonging to non-canon has been debated in literature departments for many years. Usually the key point is who has decided what should belong to the canon and what should not. As Parkinson & Reid (2000) puts it: “… how it has been formed, what it represents and to what extent it is open to alteration and development” (25). This suggests a mode of how we view art that has lingered; “Certainly, it reflects a particular ‘high’ view of art (Parkinson & Reid Thomas 25). Literature studies changed during the 1960s and 1970s and became more political. Both feminist views and African-American views where promoted and fought for since these writers did not generally belong to the canon. There was “…a paradigm shift in canon formation and literary studies generally … [and] Literature was a mode of consciousness-raising, or awakening, for feminist anger and protest” (Showalter 23).

Whether or not we should abandon the idea of canon is not really a possible option, this notion is set too deeply in English faculties around the world according to Parkinson & Reid Thomas (25). We should however question “… how we value literature; in particular the complexity of the relationship between ideology, value and historical context (Parkinson & Reid Thomas 25). If one regards all these factors and considers the reasons for selecting the
material it should not pose a problem if the material in question belongs to the canon or not. On the other hand: if one chooses the material based entirely on the fact that it belongs to canon then there is potentially a problem.

Now finally, how do we teach literature? A traditional way of teaching literature is when the teacher gives out information about the author, the work of art's background and general criticism. Then the novel or the poem is presented and can pose a hurdle linguistically and regarding its lexis. This turns the teacher into a guide where he or she will translate and explain the work of art to the students. With more advanced students another approach from the teacher can be applied where the teacher asks analytical and open questions orally and the students give their answers orally without breaking them off into groups (Collie & Slater 7-8).

According to Collie & Slater these traditional methods have a lot of drawbacks. For example the students have not made the work of art their own, discussions and oral activities with the entire class could make some shy students to close up and they will not use their L2 much when listening to their teacher. Also, when the teacher asks questions "... there is often a feeling on the part of the students that the teacher is slowly but surely edging them to particular answers that he or she has in mind" (Collie & Slater 8). Beach et al. also discusses the traditional English classroom where the teaching consists of an "... all-knowing expert who imparts knowledge to students" and the students are regarded as "... empty vessels dutifully waiting to be filled up... " (5). With this method, one will not fully know if the students have completely understood the literature and different interpretations of it. Teachers can even experience stress when teaching literature; they are striving for full coverage in terms of major works of art, information about the authors, genre and literary periods. This makes it harder to reach a deeper understanding of texts; for students to really know what they are reading and their own interpretation of the work of art. Beach et al. also discusses the drawbacks with this method and how the teacher is looking for the "... "correct answer" ... " and it will result in many passive students where the teacher has the active leading role (5-6).

According to Showalter, most teachers use a mix of various theories when teaching literature. There are also three subdivisions on the matter of how to teach: subject-centered, teacher-centered and student-centered. The first group of methods focuses on the content in the teaching, where the students are like empty vessels in which the teacher can deposit new knowledge, much like the traditional method that Collie & Slater and Beach et al. mentions. It is also called the transmission theory where the knowledge is passed on from the teacher and unto the students. One negative aspect with this method is that sometimes political views or other convictions will be passed on together with the subject’s content; “Although very few
would admit to indoctrinating our students, most of us do come into class with an agenda and an approach to the work at hand” (Showalter 29), although we should strive for an arena that is democratic and reflecting all sorts of different views on life. The second group of methods focuses on the performance of the teacher. The lesson will then be all about the teacher where the students only sit and listen with minimum participation. This requires a special teacher and not every teacher feels comfortable with this method: “Some teachers have the confidence and charisma to use the classroom as the venue for a one-man or one-woman show” (Showalter 32). The final group of methods focuses on how students learn and what we can affect in the classroom to improve their learning. The teaching develops “…toward an active, collaborative learning that takes place as the student confronts the text directly” (Showalter 35). The method encourages the students’ participation both in the learning process but also in decision making where they are allowed to vote on content within the course. This way of teaching is becoming more frequent than the traditional methods of teaching according to Elaine Showalter (35).

2.3. Lev Vygotsky's theories on sociocultural learning

Another method is sociocultural learning according to Vygotsky's theory about learning. To learn as a group with a meaningful objective and aim with the lesson at hand where the knowledge can be placed within society or culture will engage students to a greater extent. The main idea within this theory is that we as humans are a part of a bigger context, a smaller piece in a larger unit. So, the idea that flows through his theory is that we as humans are social beings in all aspects. That ultimately only life will educate us (Moll 24). Since we are situated in this social context we affect things around us and are affected ourselves by things around us. Students should learn about this connection and how the interaction works; “Through acting on things in the world they engage with the meanings that those things assumed within social activity. Humans both shape those meanings and are shaped by them” (Daniels 56).

Vygotsky makes a conclusion that the word and the act are essentially connected in human’s development: “… if the act, independent of the word, stands at the beginning of development, then at its end stands the word becoming the act” (Vygotsky 68). Another finding by Vygotsky was that when it comes to a child’s development, it is not the factors of repetition and discovery that move the learning from one level to the next, but rather the
social environment that the child is placed within where they interact with the persons in charge of the experiment (Vygotsky 20). In order to establish that social connection, speech has the utmost importance; “… the role of speech, ..., is crucial for understanding not only the structure of behavior, but also its genesis: speech stands at the very beginning of development and is its most important and decisive factor” (Vygotsky 20). Children perceive their world not only through their eyes but use the speech as a factor to investigate and understand the world (Vygotsky 29). Students benefit therefore, according to this theory, of interacting as part of a social unit where they use their speech, which are the features of pair- or group-work.

The act of teaching and learning can be placed within several contexts: social, cultural and political (Beach et al. 6), and this fact is something that teachers need to take into consideration. Furthermore, they state the benefits with applying pair-work when they work with poems; "Students can work in pairs to think-aloud together about specific aspects of a poem that they don't understand, posing questions to one another" (Beach et al. 170). And Daniels argues that a collaboration is necessary for the classroom environment to be the best; “…teaching, or instruction, should create the possibilities for development, through the kind of active participation that characterises collaboration, that it should be socially negotiated and that it should entail transfer of control to the learner” (Daniels 61). There is also an element of democracy present in his statement since the learner is invited to take responsibility for their own education. This suggests that there should be a sociocultural platform for the students in the classroom, which the teacher should try to establish (Moll 119).

Vygotsky believed that “… human learning and development depend crucially on the process of social intercourse, on the nature of our relationships – primarily relationships with other people, …” (Moll 145-146), and that there is a social origin to mental processes, for example solving problems. When our mental processes are analysed they should be looked upon culturally and placed within a developmental frame historically (Moll 29). Even as children, we are social beings so our social skills are not learnt but something that we are born with. The cultural aspect is a part of our society with signs and knowledge that has been created in that culture with a historical origin and a social content (Moll 30). Therefore, the cultural aspect of learning is where it becomes even more evident that we are social beings and have to place our knowledge and understanding within our society’s context. Vygotsky explained this as a transition between domains where the scientific concepts travelled between; “Scientific concepts grow into the everyday, into the domain of personal experience, thus acquiring meaning and significance” (Moll 35). According to Vygotsky, teachers should
have a clear view on their students as individuals and as a part of society outside of the walls in the classroom; “Students are no longer defined solely by what happens in the classroom, which is a reduced social context, important as it may be. Instead they are understood as persons who partake in a broader social life, of which the school and classroom are only one part; and they are understood with a strong sense of what their social life means in terms of funds of knowledge” (Moll 119).

Another part of Vygotsky’s theory is the idea of a zone of proximal development for every student. The zone of proximal development is the range between what a student can do on their own and what they can do with the help from the teacher or from other classmates. This opportunity could be used by the teacher to make the student progress during every lesson by involving them in group work, pair work or full class discussions (as a large group learning together). Some abilities that the students possess might only show at a time when they are working together with other classmates (Moll 33-34).

According to Harmer, there are both advantages and disadvantages when students work in pair or in groups. Some of the advantages are that the students will speak more during the lesson, they are nudged into being independent as learners, they learn how to cooperate and will not be facing the teacher all alone (sort of safety in numbers). The teacher on the other hand can focus on a pair of students giving them full attention, whilst the rest of the group is working independently. The disadvantages are factors that the teacher need to address before deciding on implementing pair- or group work. The sound level could increase during the lesson, the students might be talking about something else and/or code-switch into their native language which will leave the teacher distressed, feeling as if they are losing control over their group. The situation could also be stressful for the students since they might end up in a pair or a group where they dislike the members and are inhibited due to that fact, together with the potential situation of having students that just rather form a relationship with the teacher and no one else (116-117). However, when one evaluates results and positive outcomes from lessons, the advantages could outnumber and outweigh the disadvantages with a few exceptions.
2.4 Advantages and disadvantages in teaching literature and poetry

Sometimes failure is inevitable. This comes with the profession; not every lesson is going to turn out fine or according to plan. The reasons for this could be many (you or your students are having a bad day for instance), but then one should be confident that they have learnt something useful from the lesson although it might not be the things you aimed for. The lesson plan should then not be totally discarded but rather tried out on another day with other students (Koch 333). To avoid further failure teachers need to assess and evaluate both themselves and how they present the material to their students. Are we giving them a fair chance? As Peter Griffith points out; “… suppose, though, that it is the first book without illustrations that the pupil has had to cope with, or that it is printed in small type in the interests of economy, or even that the book is falling to bits because the school cannot afford to replace it, or that it is shared with one or more other pupils” (3). Also, it is not only the material that can affect the outcome of the lesson. Teachers must take the learning environment into consideration together with the rest of the factors: “It is Tuesday afternoon, the mower is making one of its occasional visits to the grass outside, the class next door is getting noisy, the book is being studied for a new examination, and the likelihood that an exam pass will lead to future employment in the vicinity is remote” (Griffith 3).

However, the advantages can outweigh the potential disasters that can occur since "...poems offer a special kind of reward..." (Collie & Slater 14), and the format of a shorter text and a poem is beneficial for teachers since both novels and films will be more time-consuming and thus require more lessons. Collie & Slater states as well that this material breaks off from other regular material used in L2 studies; "...literature, which speaks to the heart as much as to the mind, provides material with some emotional colour, that can make fuller contact with the learner's own life, and can thus counterbalance the more fragmented effect of many collections of texts used in the classroom" (Collie & Slater 2). But in order to tap into the advantages of teaching poetry, one needs to reach the students and engage them in the material at hand. Showalter mentions a power that comes with teaching poetry but how it is dependent on engagement; “The potential power of teaching poetry depends on active student engagement with both poetic language and meaning” (69).
3. Method and material

3.1. Research Design and Data Collecting Method

The method chosen for this study was a mixed methods design. In order to receive the data needed for analysing the didactical approach and teaching methods in question, various data collecting methods were applied. The study consists mainly of qualitative research with only a few participants that contribute with their thoughts, ideas and conceptions on the teaching methods in question. The study applied a deductive approach where a hypothesis based on previous research and ideas within the field was tested and then analysed with regards to the results found.

The design of the study was to initially perform a focus group interview, followed by observations of four lessons with students at Upper Secondary level, and finally questionnaires for the students participating in the study.

3.2. Focus Group Interview

The focus group interview was a semi-structured interview with five open questions. The participants were eight Upper Secondary teachers in a school in the county of Gavleborg, Sweden. They took part in the interview voluntarily and before its commence all of them filled in a consent form. The focus group interview was made in February 2018 and its duration was 38 min. The five questions were presented to the teachers via a PowerPoint in a classroom, where they were placed in a group seating around school benches.

The questions were:

**Question 1:** The pros and cons of integrating poetry into Upper Secondary courses. Teachers often find poetry to be a challenge, but its advantage is among other things that it has a shorter format than novels. What are your thoughts on this?

**Question 2:** Why teach literature and more to the point – poetry? How do you motivate yourself as a teacher and further down the line; your students?

**Question 3:** Which are your criteria when selecting materials for the curriculum? What are your thoughts regarding material belonging to the literary canon? And respectively material that wanders far out from the canon?

**Question 4:** How to teach poetry? There are several approaches that the teacher can choose from, but
which methods do you find fruitful when it comes to engaging students in the material?

**Question 5:**
At which level and how often would you say that you teach poetry?

### 3.3. Observations

Four lessons performed by three different teachers at a Secondary Upper school were observed during March and April 2018. The four observations will be named Class A, Class B, Class C and Class D in the essay. A presentation of the four classes will now follow. Class A consisted of 17 students taking the course ENGENG05 in their programme BA. Class B consisted of 4 students taking the course ENGENG06 in their programme BA. Class C consisted of 27 students taking the course ENGENG05 in their programme NA. Finally, Class D consisted of 24 students taking the course ENGENG06 in their programme ES.

The observation was structured with a protocol with set categories that was filled in during the lessons and two columns for comments (see Appendix IV). There is not a straightforward approach when feelings need to be measured, more precisely engagement within this study. However, when teenagers are engaged in the task at hand they will not lose focus and turn to distractions, such as mobile phones and computers. Another key that will give away students’ lack of interest is sighs. Therefore, the categories were made up of two positive columns; laughter and giggles followed by two negative columns; sighs and distractions. This was combined with two columns for comments; positive and negative, in order to complement the first four categories. The data collected from the observations were gathered together and compiled in diagrams.

### 3.4. Questionnaire

The students in all the classes observed, were given a questionnaire to fill in at the end of the lesson. This was constituted by only four questions where one of those was a closed question (see Appendix V). The aim with the questionnaire was to learn the students’ view on the lesson and its parts, which could then be matched to the findings gathered from the observation.
3.5. Material

A range of documents and data programs were used to construct and simplify the collecting of data. For the first interview, a Microsoft PowerPoint was used with seven slides, a smartphone was used for the recording of the interview and a protocol made in Microsoft Excel with different categories was used for the observations. The final element of questionnaires was created by using Microsoft Forms.

The teachers were given material for their lesson; two pages with poems (see Appendix II), one page with exercises for the poems (see Appendix III) and a lesson plan (see Appendix I). They were then given three weeks to read and prepare for the lesson and at the same time decide which group they would like to do the lesson with from the courses they have.

The selection of poems and the structure of their order for this study was based on several parameters. The first page was a selection of three poems. The first was a short quote from the film Forrest Gump (1994). The length of this was only one sentence. The second was a Winnie the Pooh quote. There was still just one sentence but with two subordinate clauses instead of one in the first quote. The last poem in this first part was an excerpt from a rock song, from a well-known group amongst teenagers, with seven lines. These three poems on the first page are examples of non-canonized poetry and could very well be argued that they are not filling the criteria for what constitutes a poem. They are picked from a contemporary film, a children’s book and contemporary rock music. They are also working as a step-ladder regarding language and linguistic features. For every new poem the students read, they get longer – thus, containing more words which is a vocabulary challenge – and an increase in semantic demands. The last poem on the first page is only an excerpt from the song which is another example of scaffolding for the students, to shorten a longer poem. If one regards parts of a poem, or in this case a song lyric, really valuable, then there is no harm in lifting out that part for the students to work with. One needs to make sure that the name of the work of art is written at the bottom together with perhaps information on the edition it belongs to. By doing so you enable, for the students that are particularly interested, the route to find the original, full-length edition for them to read if they would wish for that.

The second page contained only one poem: The Kraken by Lord Tennyson. The difference from the first page is that this poem belongs to the canon and it is not contemporary but 19th century poetry. In order to help the students overcome this leap from the demands on
the first page, some scaffolding can be found here as well. On the right side of each line, a
selected word has been translated which is considered to be the most demanding when it
comes to vocabulary. The aim is to nudge the students into a flow when they read the poem.
Without the scaffolding, the flow might be constantly interrupted.

When the material has been chosen, one has to think of an idea with every poem –
what would I like my students to do with this poem? Which results do I aim for and how do I
go about in order to reach those results? Koch (1990) labels this a ‘poetry idea’ which should
go with every poem when you design your lessons (introduction xxxi). The idea connected to
the first page with its three poems was to make them write freely on all three, just a few
sentences on each. Then, a vote on which of the three that the students liked the most was the
second idea. The poem on the second page was connected to other ideas. When working with
older poems and rhymes it is better not to focus too much on the technical part but rather
encourage the students to find patterns that are repeated in the poem, searching for word-pals
that have similar sounds (basic phonetical analysis), and spotting the words or forms from Old
English (i.e. sleepeth). Therefore, the students were asked to find rhymes and patterns in the
poem. The second idea connected to this poem was that the students should use a search
engine and find pictures on the mythological creature that Lord Tennyson described in his
poem.

3.6. Ethical Aspects

This study followed ethical guidelines when performing qualitative research involving only a
few participants. All teachers and students involved remain anonymous and participated freely
in the study. Before joining the study, a consent form was filled in where information about
the study was enclosed (see Appendix VII). The participants received information on the
study in question and learned how it will be conducted and the amount of time required. They
also had opportunities to ask questions about the study previous to the beginning of the study
and were informed on who to turn to with further questions. The school in question, where the
studies were conducted, is not named in this essay in order to keep the participating teachers
anonymous.
3.7. Shortcomings and potential criticism (Reliability and validity)

This study is problematic in its nature since the phenomena that are being measured are feelings and expressions of such from people participating in the research. Whenever research is done where people are involved they will actively affect the outcome of the study. Together with the fact that the one performing the study will also add things involuntarily into the study.

One potential criticism toward this study is the parameters used when engagement and lack of engagement is measured. The categories for the observations were selected by the one that was performing the research. One such category that turned out to be problematic was distractions since it did not disclose, without a doubt, that the students were engaged or not.

Another potential criticism toward this study is that there were two factors that were not addressed in this study; the three teachers and the size of the classes observed. The first factor has most definitely affected the outcome but has been excluded deliberately since all the focus was aimed at the students and not the performance of the teachers. The second factor did not, as could be perceived during the observation, have any bearing on the performed lesson and its design.

Another shortcoming with the study is the number of participants since there were only four observations made. There should be more lessons and students observed in order to validate the findings. If the opportunity were present, a study during a longer period of time and involving more participants would be preferred for this particular method of research.

4. Results

4.1. Focus group interview

The results from the focus group interview will be presented one question at a time and analysed under discussion. Parts of the teachers’ response will be represented here, but not all the answers. Instead, the interview in its entirety can be found at the end of the essay (see Appendix VI).

The first question regarding the pros and cons of integrating poetry into Upper Secondary courses made the teachers instantly engaged in the interview. The first response came quickly and they addressed the cons initially. There were points made on the demands
on the students such as “... the students are not proficient enough. Then there’s too much explaining.” by the first teacher, and another teacher fills in that; “... you have to make the situation correct. It’s all about minimizing the risks...”. The two following teachers address the responsibility that we as teachers have "We need to prepare the students for poetry. They are not ready yet...” and that the selection of material is important, "I think it’s all about finding the right poetry. When I went to school, we had too much classical and difficult poetry". The final responses to this question are positive and the teachers address the pros with teaching poetry "But if you plan it you can do it all in one lesson. That’s really good. You will have started and finished something in one lesson”.

The second question regarding motivation as teachers, on why we teach literature and more to the point – poetry, gave several thoughts and ideas. One teacher stated that "It’s part of who I am. I love literature”, and another stated that it; “Shows how it is like in other cultures during that time-period. The subjects can be the same, because they’re writing about the same things now”. The teachers also addressed the difficulties they can face regarding motivation, where one teacher said that; “... you have to find a good way". This suggests that the method together with the selection of material is vital when tapping in to students’ motivation. One teacher mentioned that; “I think poetry can function like a bridge between academic and more common literature", thus aiding in minimizing the difficulties the teacher might face when using more challenging material in class. Then a few of the teachers gave examples of the benefits with teaching poetry; linguistically - “...you can make them study more grammar, vocabulary in that way...”, confidence and speaking ability - "Poetry learns students to express themselves...", and finally inclusion where every student can perform - "The good thing is that you can’t do it wrong... The weak ones can produce something, even if it is only a few lines".

On the third question, regarding the selection of material and the division between canon and non-canonicalized material, the teachers all agreed that canon is not a parameter in the selection process. One teacher stated that; "It’s good to have the whole spectra, like a smorgasbord”, and another teacher based the selection on two parameters; “I choose my poems based on accessibility and relevance". Two teachers named Bob Dylan as a source for their material, and that he is more approved now after receiving the Nobel prize.

On the fourth question regarding how to teach poetry, the teachers list several methods and approaches. The teachers use songs, haiku, role play, word gaps and rhymes. Some of them work with translation by applying it both ways (NL-TL and TL-NL). One of the teachers mentions quizzing – to pick up the words and make their own poems. And a few of the
teachers bring up the sheets where, if you fill in the lines correctly, it turns into a shape or an object, a heart for example.

The fifth and final question regarding the levels and occurrence in which they teach poetry gave varying answers. One teacher stated that it is “... depending on situation and the group" and another stated that "I tend not to do it as much but I try to bring out a classical piece to show them that it is out there". One teacher addressed the levels on when to teach poetry; "Maybe in Eng 5, ... it is too early. In Eng 7, ... they are supposed to have this level of understanding and should have already done it. I think Eng 6 is the best level ... where you do the most."

4.2. Observation 1

The results from the observation will be presented on their own initially with both the findings from the observation and the students’ answers from the questionnaire. These four observations’ results will then be followed by a summary of the results.

The first observation was made on a Friday afternoon with a class consisting of 17 students. This class will be named class A in the essay.

Diagram 4.1: Summary Class A.

There were a lot of positive comments during this lesson. A few students exclaimed “good!” and “oh, cool!” as a response to the first page of poems. Another student turned on the song on the smart phone and said to the neighbouring students; “Listen to this!”. When the students turned to the second page, more positive comments were delivered; “Is it like an Octopussy?”
and “Look guys – we need to find the rhymes!”.

The negative comments were; “What?”, “I don’t understand, what should we do?”, and on the second page; “I don’t understand anything!” and “I don’t want to read anymore”. This signals that the students did not understand what was demanded of them and they had a hard time with their motivation during this lesson. These students were also the ones that made the sighs to express their discontentment.

Now the opinions of the students that were participating will be presented. The results from the four questions in the questionnaire can be seen below:

![Diagram 4.2: Question 1 Class A.](image)

![Diagram 4.3: Question 2 Class A.](image)
4.3. Observation 2

The second observation was made on a Monday afternoon with a class consisting of 4 students. This class will be named class B in the essay.
There were only positive comments during this lesson. These were made on the first page, where one student commented about the Winnie the Pooh quote; “When I was a child, I watched him on TV!”, and two other students commented on the song; “Oh, I know this one. The text is really good.” and “A very beautiful song!”.

Now the opinions of the students that were participating will be presented. The results from the four questions in the questionnaire can be seen below:

**Diagram 4.7: Question 1 Class B.**

**Diagram 4.8: Question 2 Class B.**

**Diagram 4.9: Question 3 Class B.**
4.4. Observation 3

The third observation was made on a Wednesday afternoon with a class consisting of 27 students. This class will be named class C in the essay.

There were not so many comments during this lesson, although the class was a large one. The positive comments were; “Yes!” and “This is so cool!”, and one negative comment was “I don’t understand this part”. During the second page however, some students started on a full translation of the poem by Lord Tennyson. This would suggest that the class consisted of highly motivated students.

Now the opinions of the students that were participating will be presented. The results from the four questions in the questionnaire can be seen below:
Diagram 4.12: Question 1 Class C.

How do you feel about this lesson?

- It was good
- It was bad
- Nothing in particular

Diagram 4.13: Question 2 Class C.

Did you learn something new today?

- Yes
- No

Diagram 4.14: Question 3 Class C.

Which part was the most fun?

- Part 1
- Part 2
- Both
- None of them were fun
4.5. Observation 4

The final observation was made on a Monday morning with a class consisting of 24 students. This class will be named class D in the essay.

There were only positive comments during this lesson, which was similar to class B. During the first part the students wrote extensively about the first three poems. Then, many of them were eager to turn the page and start working with the last poem. One student stated; “This is a really old poem!” and another student exclaimed happily “Pirates of the Caribbean!”

Another phenomenon detected during the observation was that the teacher read *The Kraken* out loud with much expression and involvement, whereby the class went silent (which stands out extensively since the class is otherwise noisy and rowdy).
Now the opinions of the students that were participating will be presented. The results from the four questions in the questionnaire can be seen below:

Diagram 4.17: Question 1 Class D.

Diagram 4.18: Question 2 Class D.

Diagram 4.19: Question 3 Class D.
4.6. Summary and analysis of the results

The questionnaire that the students filled in showed that most of them appreciated the first part the most (40 out of 72 students). Another positive outcome was that as much as 17 students enjoyed both parts. The results from the voting on the first three poems were in all classes (A-D) the second poem the quote from Winnie the Pooh by A.A. Milne. This outcome suggests that although these students are teenagers they will appreciate material that are more directed to younger children. The results on which part the students appreciated the most also shows how important the selection process is and that it might be wrong if you only choose material belonging to canon. Now a summary of both positive and negative results will be presented:

Diagram 4.20: Question 4 Class D.
Overall, the results from the study were mainly positive. The classrooms were filled with a majority of laughter and giggles. As much as 51 students out of 72 thought that it was a good lesson, and even more students (56) marked that they had learnt something new. Finally, the lesson had such an impact on 17 students that it changed their views on poetry.

The negative results were low in comparison with the previous diagram. Only one out of 72 students thought that it was a bad lesson, and 16 students stated that they did not learn something new. The column with sighs and distractions are only 42 compared to 142 laughter and giggles, and most of them belong to distractions. The distractions were mostly mobile phones and laptops which is an expected result since this is quite common in today’s classrooms, and it does not always have a correlation with how they experienced the lesson since the students marked that it was a good lesson.

5. Discussion

5.1. The Teachers’ View

The results from the interview with the teachers in the focus group revealed several aspects and complexities with teaching literature. The first aspect was that teachers need confidence and to feel secure when teaching this sort of material. We as teachers need to read as much poetry as we do with the other parts in English literature, both during the educational years
and then later on when practicing the profession. There are however many teachers that lack the knowledge and the self-confidence when it comes to teaching poetry. Koch quotes a response from an uncertain teacher; “I haven’t read enough poetry to know how to teach it. There wasn’t time to read much poetry, even in college. Since I don’t know much poetry, I feel insecure about it; sometimes it makes me nervous. Given these conditions, how can I ask my students to write poetry and then help them do it?” (329). On the other hand, one teacher from the focus group stated that: “I just love it”, which makes the motivation for bringing poetry into class easier since the teacher has both a personal interest in the field and thus the confidence to perform the lessons. Now, adolescents are of course problematic in their own way but very much depends on how the teacher tackle them and the poetry according to Koch: “... but a teacher who knows students and can be enthusiastic and at the same time free and easy with them about poetry should be able to teach it very well” (Introduction li).

The second aspect was that very much depend on the material you select. The teachers in the focus group interview stated that they did not bother with canon or non-canonized material, but rather picked things that they had access to and that they believed to be relevant for their teaching. One teacher stressed how important it is to choose the right material, which is also argued by Collie & Slater since the poetry should be meaningful and relevant. Harmer also stresses the fact of involvement and engagement and how these two factors can lead to an increase regarding engagement. The students should also be introduced to a variety, like a smorgasbord as one of the teachers stated. This idea is also mentioned by Koch where a variety of poets are beneficial for students to be exposed to. The teachers also stated that students are not really ready for poetry and that we need to prepare them for this, regarding proficiency. That fact would suggest that we need to increase the frequency of lessons on poetry and slowly introduce the students to more demanding poets.

The third aspect was; how do the teacher then design the lesson after the selection of the ‘right’ material has been made? You have to find the right design when teaching poetry, as one teachers said – find a good way. The teachers also mention several methods and ideas connected to teaching poetry. This suggests that they have the ideas in order to design fruitful lessons. However, they stated that they did not teach poetry that often during their courses. The next step is then to increase the consistency and regularity, so that the lessons on poetry are recurrent. Together with confidence in teaching these lessons, selecting the ‘right’ material and designing the lesson with distinct ideas connected to each poem, teaching poetry should lead to success in the classroom.

A fourth aspect, which was revealed during the observations, was that the pair-work
was a success during every lesson. The students immediately turned to their neighbour and started with the first task. This pattern repeated itself for every new task and showed how fruitful this method is when it comes to learning. We learn together as social beings and as a part of a unit. It was discernible then during the study that to leave the students ‘on their own’, still gave the result that learning took place since many students marked that they had learnt something new during the lesson (56 out of 72). The ideas that Vygotsky had regarding pedagogy that with the aid of others the student moves forward in their zone of proximal development, are supported in this study. However, these types of lessons often become loud, since sometimes up to 27 students are talking and integrating at the same time. They also require that the teacher takes a step back, sort of running the lesson by ‘being in the backseat’. This is a type of method that not every teacher enjoys or are comfortable with. Sometimes during the study, teachers showed a clear discomfort with the noise and not running the show, which is probably their preferred method. The students on the other hand, did not appear bothered. Therefore, to make teachers implement the ideas of sociocultural learning into their lessons, they need to practice on letting go of the control somewhat. Both Beach et. al and Daniels argues for the benefits that comes with pair-work, and Harmer mentions advantages with this method. Two important advantages are that it learns students to cooperate and to become independent as learners. The observations in this study showed both these features and this could argue for a higher amount of pair-work within literature in Upper Secondary courses.

5.2. The Students’ Perspective

The manner in which this lesson was designed had, according to the results in this study, a positive outcome where the majority of students in this study considered this lesson on poetry to be a good lesson (51 out of 72). From the student’s view, the results point to a preference of non-canonized and less complex poems since most of the students (40 out of 72) appreciated the first part the most.

The voting that took part in the middle of the lesson was an appreciated section of the lesson where the teachers were able to receive every student’s attention, since they were eagerly waiting for the result. During the last observation (Class D), this section of the lesson was done dramatically by the teacher, where comparisons with Eurovision Song Contest was drawn which added to the students’ engagement.

In the first observation, the teacher read the second part, the poem by Lord Tennyson,
with a lot of personal engagement and empathy. This turned the students into becoming spell-bound which was an excellent way to make them interested in more difficult poems. The results showed that 6 students out of the total of 17 in this class marked that they enjoyed the second part or both the most. Here in this incident the teacher has possibly an impact on the results, which emphasizes the importance of being confident and familiar with this kind of teaching.

In the third observation, a few of the students were highly motivated and proficient within their target language. During the second part of their lesson, these students started to translate the poem by Lord Tennyson, and not as a free translation but as a direct translation. This outcome validates the choice to include more demanding poetry belonging to canon, because it will inspire and challenge the more proficient students in your class.

5.3. Suggestions for Further Research

Due to the findings in this study, a continuation on this topic can be suggested as further research. The studying of teaching methods is of interest for teachers and will benefit future students by extension. A set of material with a given didactical approach that has proven to be successful when teaching Upper Secondary students, will hold much value for everyone that is teaching literature. Certainly, less confident and knowledgeable teachers could find comfort in relying on a given lesson plan, with the selected material connected with it, approved by researchers.

One different approach for a future study would be to include and engage the participating teachers more in the research. One way of doing this would be to ask the teachers to use questionnaires, both for themselves and for their students after newly designed lessons, to assess their own work and the design regarding method and material. In a sense: does this method and material make my students reach new knowledge and understanding?

Furthermore, an extension of the study, with more observations and in more than one school, would aid in validating the potential findings and increase reliability regarding the results. There is also room for improvement on how to measure engagement most accurately. And finally, a continued research on the impacts regarding canonized vs non–canonized material is desirable. This is interesting when one ponders over the selection of material. If teachers are more involved in a future study, this topic could be added as a further dimension that they need to assess. In this study, the poems that appealed the most to the students does not belong to canon and could by some be claimed as not even being poetry. In this matter,
Reid Thomas & Parkinson state that we should question how we value literature, which calls for further questioning and a discussion on this topic.

6. Conclusion

This study has aimed to prove a hypothesis: that the design of a lesson, with regards to methods, will affect how students in Upper Secondary school engage in English poetry. The results showed that the design has an impact when it comes to engagement. The main finding in the study was that students prefer less complex poetry that does not belong to canon, since most of the students marked the first part as the best one. Therefore, the most vital part when designing poetry lessons is to carefully select the ‘right’ material for the students in question. A secondary aim with the study was to observe potential benefits with sociocultural learning according to Vygotsky’s theories. The study showed that all classes engaged in pair-work that had a positive outcome on both their experience of the lesson and their learning where more than half the students marked that they had learnt something new during the lesson.

However, there are nevertheless faults with this study, which could have impacted on the findings. There is a large ingredient of myself within both the study and the following essay. I have not taken an active part as such during the interview and the following observations, but just my presence will affect the events in the room. How this factor affects the surroundings is hard to predict and discern which is why I have chosen to accept the findings from the study and not focus too much on what I might have added. Another large contribution on my part is the design of the lesson which is done solely by me, the decision on which categories to have in the observational sheet and which questions to pose in the interview. All these parameters might have been different if another person would have done this study. This study and its design is not one that is claimed to be the ultimate. Finally, one has to address the expected criticism of the claimed findings in this study. Although the findings point, in my opinion, to a success rate regarding the lessons observed, one could always argue that the design of this lesson does not enter in to it. The findings in this study would have appeared regardless of how or what was taught due to a natural engagement by these students.
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Collected: 2018-02-25
Appendix I:

Lesson plan for the study in methods in teaching English poetry

Number of students:
Students' age:
Students' level:
Time:

Prerequisites: None. The students will only learn previously that they will have a lesson on poetry and it will be observed by another teacher.

Materials needed: A document with the poems, in total 5 poems varying in length. This could be administered as copied sheets of paper or as a pdf posted in the students' virtual classroom. The students will need pencils, paper and computers with internet connection.

Skills tested: Out of the four sets of skills the lesson will focus on reading comprehension and writing abilities. Their reading skills will be developed when the students are reading the poems and extracting meaning from the sentences. Their skill in writing will be focused on during the exercise on the first part of the lesson. The students will be asked to write a few sentences as a response to what they have read.

Objectives: The main objective will be to introduce the students for various poems where one belongs to the canon and the others are in a way challenging the definition of a poem. The emphasis will be laid on engaging the students in the task of understanding and reacting towards different poems.

Activities:

Warm up (2-3 min): A briefing of today's lesson. The teacher will explain that the lesson is divided into two parts, and that each part has exercises connected to it.

Part I (15-20 min): The students are asked to read the three shorter poems on the first page. The exercise here is to write a few sentences in response to each poem. The writing should be without pressure on performance (think 'stream of consciousness'). Then as a final activity on the first part, the students are asked to vote on the best poem out of the three. Depending on the group the teacher will make the decision on how to do the voting (mark on the whiteboard, mentimeter by clapping hands and stomping their feet, or anonymous notes collected in a tin).

Optional break (5 min)

Part II (25 min): The students are asked to read the last poem on the second page. They are helped
with some of the translation, where the most difficult words in each line has a translation into their
target language on the right side. One of the exercise in the second part is to use a search engine and
type the title of the poem. The teacher then tells the students to select images. This should result in
presenting one or more pictures of the creature that the poet has written about. The second exercise
is to search the poem for repeating structures and rhymes, encouraging the students to regard the
poem from a linguistic view. The teacher can walk around in the classroom and actively support and
motivate the students, giving them the tip that the clues can be found more easily when the lines are
read out loud.

Cool down (4-5 min): A short questionnaire is given to the students. The teacher thanks the students
for their good work during the lesson and perhaps gives instructions on upcoming lessons. If the
main parts of the lesson have been time-consuming, there is an option to do the questionnaire at a
later occasion.

Assessment: The teacher can choose to collect the written sentences from part I if they need or
want written work from their students. However, the main objective is not to assess the students in
this study, but rather to engage them in English poetry.
Appendix II:

Poems

Life is like a box of chocolates,
  you never know what you're gonna get.

(From the film Forrest Gump, 1994 by Robert Zemeckis)

When the tears come streaming down your face
When you lose something you can't replace
When you love someone but it goes to waste
Could it be worse?

Lights will guide you home
And ignite your bones
And I will try to fix you

(Fix You - Coldplay, EMI 2005)
The Kraken
by Lord Tennyson 1809-1892

Below the thunders of the upper deep,
Far, far beneath in the abysmal sea
His ancient, dreamless, uninvaded sleep
The Kraken sleepeth: faintest sunlights flee
About his shadowy sides; above him swell
Huge sponges of millennial growth and height
And far away into the sickly light,
From many a wondrous grot and secret cell
Unnumbered and enormous polypi
Winnow with giant arms the slumbering green.
There hath he lain for ages, and will lie
Battening upon huge sea worms in his sleep
Until the latter fire shall heat the deep;
Then once by man and angels to be seen,
In roaring he shall rise and on the surface die.

(1830)
Appendix III:

Exercises in English poetry

Page 1:

1. Read the three shorter poems. Feel free to discuss with your neighbour and help out with translation.

2. Write a few sentences for each one. What is it about? How does it make you feel? Is it a happy or a sad poem?

3. Now you need to vote for the best one. Read them all one more time and then decide which one you like the most.

Page 2:

1. Read the poem and try to understand most of it. Feel free to work with your neighbour or ask your teacher for help on translation and meaning.

2. Open a search engine on your computer and enter the words in the title; The Kraken. Choose images and watch the different pictures that comes up. Have you seen this creature before?

3. Study the poem again. What structures can you find? Are there rhymes, if yes - how is it done?
Appendix IV:

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<th>Distractions</th>
<th>Positive comments</th>
<th>Negative comments</th>
<th>Results from voting</th>
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Appendix V:

Questionnaire

Svaret är anonymt.

1. How do you feel about this lesson?
   ᐈ It was good.
   ᐈ It was bad.
   ᐈ Nothing in particular.

2. Did you learn something new today?
   ᐈ Yes
   ᐈ No

3. Which part was the most fun?
   ᐈ Part 1
   ᐈ Part 2
   ᐈ Both
   ᐈ None of them were fun.

4. Has this lesson changed how you think about poetry?
   ᐈ Yes
   ᐈ No
   ᐈ Nothing in particular
Appendix VI:

Transcription of the focus group interview

The pauses are marked with ... and indicated with [pause] when they are longer than just a breath in a sentence. My only contribution to this interview was by moving it forward by thanking for the discussion on that question and then reading through the next question.

Question 1: The pros and cons of integrating poetry into Upper Secondary courses. Teachers often find poetry to be a challenge, but its advantage is among other things that it has a shorter format than novels. What are your thoughts on this?

T1: "A con is when the students are not proficient enough. Then there's too much explaining."
T2: "A con is that you have to make the situation correct. It’s all about minimizing the risks. You always have to keep them occupied."

[Other teachers agree and they say that it feels like they have to be present to guide the students all the time. A sort of outer momentum is needed.]

T3: "We need to prepare the students for poetry. They are not ready yet. And students today take things more literally, they can’t find the hidden meanings."

T4: "I think it’s all about finding the right poetry. When I went to school, we had too much classical and difficult poetry."

T1: "But if you plan it you can do it all in one lesson. That’s really good. You will have started and finished something in one lesson."

T5: "I think shorter poems are better, for language reasons."

[Then one of the teachers address the others and asks; “Writing poetry. Do you do that?”]

T4: "Yeah, I make them do shopping lists and haikus!"

[Then all the teachers engage in a discussion on students’ production in poetry.]

Question 2: Why teach literature and more to the point – poetry? How do you motivate yourself as a teacher and further down the line; your students?

T5: "It’s part of who I am. I love literature. It’s more difficult with the students but you have to find a good way."

T2: "It has a part in our curriculum and it shows the students a specific part of a time in literature. Shows how it is like in other cultures during that time-period. The subjects can be the same, because they're writing about the same things now."

[The teachers nod and agree to that statement.]
T3: "Also, I think poetry can function like a bridge between academic and more common literature."

T6: "Maybe you can make them study more grammar, vocabulary in that way. I don’t know the exact word for it."

T7: "Poetry learns students to express themselves. Reading poetry in different voices, and acting out poetry for example."

T1: "The good thing is that you can’t do it wrong. Another student can’t look at another student’s writing and say that it is wrong. I like the bridge thing because it also bridges the gap for students. The weak ones can produce something, even if it is only a few lines."

**Question 3:** Which are your criteria when selecting materials for the curriculum? What are your thoughts regarding material belonging to the literary canon? And respectively material that wanders far out from the canon?

.... [pause]

T7: "It’s good to have the whole spectra, like a smorgasbord. I worked with gap tests in songs, to listen to nouns, verbs and other structure. Poetry can be used as a tool."

T3: "You can always use it in context too. We use Shakespeare to show origins of language and the accents. To study history and society."

T1: "I have used Bob Dylan for many years and now he is approved because he won the Nobel prize last year."

T5: "For me this question has no meaning. I choose my poems based on accessibility and relevance."

T1: "I agree with you. I don’t care about canon."

T7: "They learn songs by heart. But to learn to recite a poem goes against what is considered ok, I think."

T3: "You know, Bob Dylan – I talk about the cold war with one of his songs."

T7: "It gives a very strong emotional value."

**Question 4:** How to teach poetry? There are several approaches that the teacher can choose from, but which methods do you find fruitful when it comes to engaging students in the material?

[The teachers list several methods and approaches; songs, haiku, role play, word gaps, rhymes. Some of them work with translation, both ways (NL-TL]
and TL-NL). One of the teachers mentions quizzing – to pick up the words and make their own poems. And a few of the teachers brings up the sheets where, if you fill in the lines correctly, it turns into a shape or an object, a heart for example.]

**Question 5:** At which level and how often would you say that you teach poetry?

T7: - "Both. As we mentioned before, depending on situation and the group."

T1: - "I tend not to do it as much but I try to bring out a classical piece to show them that it is out there."

...[minor pause]

"If you really respect the thing it is excellent but if it crashes it’s horrible."

T3: - "Maybe in Eng 5, ... it is too early. In Eng 7, ... they are supposed to have this level of understanding and should have already done it. I think Eng 6 is the best level ... where you do the most."
Appendix VII:

Concession to participation in a research study

You will hereby give your consent to participate in a study where methods in teaching poetry in Upper Secondary school courses are observed and analysed. Read this document carefully and then give your consent by writing your signature below.

Consent

- I have received information on the study in question and know how it will be conducted and the amount of time required.
- I have had an opportunity to ask questions about the study previous to the beginning of the study and I am informed on who to turn to with further questions.
- We participate in this study voluntarily and I have received information about why we have been asked and the aim of the study.
- I know that I can leave the study at any point during the research without disclosing the reasons why.
- I give my consent to the research leader to gather and store information during the study, and I have been informed that the study follows ethical guidelines and no personal information will be published.
- I give my consent with the demand that collected data will only be processed by the research leader.

Location and date: ............................................................

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Signature Signatory (name in block letters)