



# Literature in decline? Differences in pre-service and in-service primary school teachers' reading experiences



Håvard Skaar\*, Lisbeth Elvebakk, Jannike Hegdal Nilssen

Department of Teacher Education, Oslo & Akershus University College of Applied Sciences, P.O. Box 4, St. Olavs Plass, 0130 Oslo, Norway

## HIGHLIGHTS

- Norwegian pre-service and in-service teachers report little interest in reading literature.
- Few teachers, and practically no teacher students, are eager readers of traditional literature.
- To counterbalance we need a curriculum in defense of literature.
- More time must be devoted to literature reading in teacher education.

## ARTICLE INFO

### Article history:

Received 26 March 2017

Received in revised form

20 October 2017

Accepted 25 October 2017

### Keywords:

Phenomenological hermeneutics

Interest in reading

Literature reading

Primary school pre-service teachers

Primary school in-service teachers

## ABSTRACT

In a qualitative investigation informed by phenomenological hermeneutics, we analyzed 249 narratives in which Norwegian pre-service and in-service teachers describe themselves as literature readers. Generally, the in-service teachers have read more than the pre-service teachers. The analysis indicates a development whereby teachers who “unconditionally appreciate” literature, are about to disappear. Instead, literature reading is experienced as being too difficult to cope with, and therefore increasingly opted out of or not prioritized. In the final section, we discuss how the status and function of literature in school can be maintained in the presence of the continuous decline in teachers' reading.

© 2017 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

## 1. Introduction

Norwegian surveys show that young people's reading is in decline. Research from other countries confirms this trend (e.g., [Johnsson-Smaragdi & Jönsson, 2006](#); [National Endowment for the Arts, 2016](#); [Vaage, 2017](#)). Young people planning to become teachers are not more eager readers than other groups. Some studies even show pre-service teachers themselves are a group with very little interest in reading literary fiction ([Petersson, 2009](#); [Wicklund, Larsen, & Vikbrant, 2016](#)). Nevertheless, it is still commonly believed that teachers who value literature the most are also the best at inspiring their students to read ([McKool & Gespass, 2009](#); [Morrison, Jacobs, & Swinyard, 1999](#)). This is called the “Peter effect” in the research literature, a biblical allusion to the apostle Peter who told a beggar asking for money that he could not give

something he himself did not have ([Applegate & Applegate, 2004](#); [Applegate et al., 2014](#)). Three teacher educators prepared this article and our mission in our work is to prevent future teachers from ending up in a situation where they too are expected to give something they themselves do not have. We must inspire them to become eager readers. To succeed in this, we need as much knowledge as possible about what is actually causing their low levels of reading interest.

Therefore, we conducted a study to compare in-service and pre-service primary school teachers' interest in reading literature. Although pre-service and in-service teachers' reading has been researched nationally and internationally, to our knowledge the reading interest in these two groups has not yet been compared in a study. A comparison can provide more knowledge about what today's pre-service teachers do not possess compared to previous generations of teachers. Accordingly, greater knowledge is needed about what teacher educators must do to help compensate for this deficiency in the education of teacher students.

\* Corresponding author.

E-mail address: [havard.skaar@hioa.no](mailto:havard.skaar@hioa.no) (H. Skaar).

The study is based on 249 “reading histories”. In Skaar, Elvebakk, and Nilssen (2016), we explored the reading histories of 163 pre-service teachers. In this article, we compare their accounts of how literature forms part of their lifeworld with similar histories collected from 86 in-service teachers. The participants in both groups were asked to write a narrative about their reading experiences, describe how their reading of literature had changed throughout their life, and explain how they had become the readers they are.

In the subsequent analysis, we posed three questions concerning the collected narratives:

1. Are there differences in what in-service and pre-service teachers have read?
2. Are there differences in how their reading has developed throughout their lives?
3. Are there differences in how they relate to and experience literature?

After a review of the existing research, we explain the theoretical and methodological basis of our study. Next, we present and discuss the findings. Finally, we round off with some thoughts on which steps teacher education should take to make teachers more capable of conveying enthusiasm for literature and reading to students in the future.

## 2. Previous research

### 2.1. Reading in the general population

Statistics Norway reports that 23 percent of the Norwegian population was book readers in 2015. The number was similar 25 years ago, but not among young people, with 16- to 24-year-olds today reading less than before (down from 28 to 16 percent) and 25- to 44-year-olds showing a stable reading interest, just below the average for the total population. Inversely, older people report more reading than before. In all age groups, literary fiction is the dominant and preferred genre (Vaage, 2017, pp. 33–36). Statistics Norway defines book reading as the reading of printed books. Reading aloud to children and reading that is related to studies and work is not included.

While the Norwegian Booksellers Association's 2016 annual survey confirms that the reading of books (printed books, audio-books, and e-books, not textbooks and books related to studies) in the total population is stable, it is diminishing among 15- to 29-year-olds (Den norske forleggerforening [DNF], 2016). Conversely, older people lift up the average level of reading in the total population. Otherwise, surveys show that “digital activities” are rocketing, especially among young people (Andersen & Bakken, 2015; Bakken, 2016). Parallel to this, figures from several other countries show that younger people are generally reading less literary fiction than ever (National Endowment for the Arts, 2016).

### 2.2. Reading among pre-service and in-service teachers

Norwegian and Swedish studies of primary school in- and pre-service teachers show a particularly weak reading interest in these groups (Jönsson & Eriksson, 2003; Petersson, 2009). Quite a few pre-service teachers report not to read literature at all (Brink, 2009; Wicklund et al., 2016). In addition, pre-service primary school teachers read less than teacher students who are preparing for higher educational levels (Petersson, 2009). The same lack of reading interest is found in a number of American studies. McKool and Gespass (2009) discovered that, although the teachers in their study highly valued literary engagement, the time they actually

spent on reading literature was very limited. Nathanson, Pruslow, and Levitt (2008) and Applegate and Applegate (2004) found a particularly weak literary interest among teachers and pre-service teachers. Kennedy (2014) found that the pre-service teachers in her study were not engaged in pleasure reading. The majority of the participants had no literary interests, even though they reported positive childhood reading experiences. Studies from Spain, Turkey, Singapore, and Britain confirm these tendencies (Cox & Schatzel, 2007; Cremin, Mottram, Bearne, & Goodwin, 2008; Demiroz & Yesilyurt, 2015; Granado, 2014; Pitfield & Obied, 2010).

### 2.3. Perspectives on in-service and pre-service teachers' literature reading

When the role of literature in school is examined in the context of mother-tongue education in Norway, the typical starting point is the words of the curricula, theories of literary didactics and pedagogy, or classroom practices. Most frequently, the topic is approached from the perspective of students, not teachers (see e.g., Dokset, 2015; Hamre, 2014; Kaspersen, 2012; Kjelen, 2013; Penne, 2012). At primary school level, we found one study of Norwegian and Swedish pre-service teachers' reading, and a couple of studies concerning the Swedish context only (Petersson, 2009; Thorson, 2009). Apart from literature reading itself, the relationship between teachers' choice of literature in the classroom and their personal reading preferences has been examined (Brink, 2009). Two contributions investigate the literary competence of Norwegian pre-service teachers based on written assignments and exams (Kjelen, 2014; Skafun, Karlsen, & Syvertsen, 2015). In addition, a master's thesis gives a quantitative account of reading among Norwegian upper secondary school teachers (Storrusten, 2010). In all these studies, the importance of teachers' own reading interest seems to be taken for granted when considering ways to help enliven students' interest and enthusiasm, but in so doing this dwindling reading interest among future teachers is being overlooked. One might in any event ask: what difference does it make? By applying our phenomenological approach, we looked to shed light on this by comparing pre-service and in-service teachers' narratives about their own reading. Although reading histories of a similar kind have also been collected in other studies (Granado & Puig, 2015; MacPhee & Sanden, 2016; Wicklund et al., 2016), to date no study has compared reading histories of this kind from different generations of teachers. Nathanson, Pruslow, and Levitt (2008) include both groups of teachers in their American survey, but do not compare them. The present study seeks to contribute to filling this gap.

The research literature has established that good readers go on to become good reading teachers. Only by comparing in-service and pre-service teachers' reading activity and reading interest can we gain more knowledge about what teacher educators must work on to safeguard the quality of literary education in the future.

## 3. Methods

### 3.1. Phenomenological hermeneutics

The analysis of the collected material is informed by phenomenological hermeneutics.

(Gadamer, 1989; Husserl, 1983). Husserl rejected the dichotomy between subject and object by claiming that any understanding is subjective and thus so too is the recognition of a division between subject and object. To overcome this, he developed his phenomenological method to reveal how a phenomenon, e.g. reading of literature, appears and is intelligible to us in our so-called lifeworld. By careful analysis, Husserl searched to distinguish the essence of a

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/6850227>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/6850227>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)