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Views of poetry as a competence expressed by students in teacher education

Abstract. Since 2011 the Swedish curriculum has been oriented towards creating knowledge at school that is measurable and evidence-based. At the same time, there is still an overarching aim for education at school to stress equality by, among other things, letting all students use languages of their own to express themselves. This conflict, between knowledge that is measurable and goals aiming at maintaining democracy, also characterizes teacher education in Sweden. Hence, there are reasons to discuss the role of aesthetics at school by focusing on students' views of the role of poetry in education. We present qualitative data consisting of interviews with eight student teachers being educated to work in primary school. In this way, a variety of conceptions of poetry, and the role of poetry at school, are captured and analyzed, which in turn, makes it possible to discuss what counts as a competence at school. The results show that lack of knowledge about aesthetic expressions limits the student teachers' agency in several ways. They express a lack of self-confidence and they are afraid of being trapped by the school system in spite of their aspirations to work independently with poetry and other aesthetic expressions

Keywords: aesthetic expressions; poetry for language development; competence; democracy through language development; teacher education; Swedish comprehensive school.

Introduction

Since 2011, the Swedish curriculum has been oriented towards creating knowledge at school that is measurable and evidence-based. At the same time, there is still an overarching aim for education at school to stress equality by, among other things, letting all students use languages of their own to express themselves (Skolverket, 2011). This conflict between knowledge that is measurable and goals aiming at maintaining democracy, also characterizes teacher education in Sweden. Hence, there are reasons to discuss the role of aesthetics at school by focusing on students' views of the role of poetry in education. Do students who are being educated to be teachers in comprehensive school consider knowledge of poetry to be a competence worth achieving, and if so, for what reasons?

Aesthetics in comprehensive school

To be able to discuss possible answers to the research question, some background is needed, taking into account the variety of views of aesthetic activities at school that existed before the introduction of the new curriculum in 2011.

Aesthetics in curricula. The word *aesthetics* comes from the Greek *aistheticos*, which is derived from *aistheta* meaning "perceptible things" and *aisthesthai* meaning "perceive". Plato developed thoughts about what aesthetics may include, making distinctions between intellectual knowledge and sensible experiences. During the influence of Romanticism, when Platonism was in focus, philosopher Baumgarten expressed his ideas about aesthetics and sensibilities by moving away from the focus on aesthetic qualities of artworks to sensible experiences of the world and art (Danius, Sjöholm & Wallenius, 2012; Dahlbäck & Lyngfelt, 2017). Knowledge through sensible experiences was now appreciated and became the subject of philosophical discussions; aesthetics developed into theories of sensuality, valuing the ability to perceive sensual experiences.

In Sweden, aesthetics has been discussed particularly in relation to the content of the subject Swedish which includes literature. During the 19th century, from 1842 when the first compulsory school [folkskolan] was introduced in Sweden, teaching in the subject Swedish consisted of writing, grammar and reading of religious texts (Thavenius, 1999). However, during the 20th century, comprehensive school was extended to comprise

nine years (from 1955), and the subject Swedish was developed to include analysis of literature and history of literature. This striving for "Bildung" played a role in the creation of the Swedish national state, as did the efforts to create possibilities for "cultural capital" for all citizens in the (emerging) welfare state. In fact, curricula during the last fifty years could be said to consider the study of art as a way of developing democratic citizens by the development of humanistic values. In the curriculum from 1980 in particular, democratic values are foregrounded. Here work with the arts appears to be important in all subjects in comprehensive school. This focus on art, and the idea of children as creative, partly goes back to the influence of Rousseau; in Sweden, the belief in children's inner driving forces and creative power has been strong, especially since the seventies (Lyngfelt, 2003).

In the curriculum of 1980, poetry could be said to have quite a strong position. Here, poetry is related to children's experiences and the need to express themselves. Reading and writing poems are said to give nuance and precision to contemporary experience of words and reality, whether these activities are concerned with the first flowers of spring, events in the schoolyard or something dealt with in the newspaper. Links between poetry and other forms of art are also stressed during this period, especially between poetry, painting and music.

Yet it is in the curriculum from 1950 that you find the most explicit description of the intrinsic value of reading poetry at school:

> Desirably, the students' minds are opened for poetry and for what is literally valuable. However, caution must be taken so that the texts being read do not exceed the students' ability, or reach beyond their experiences. To a great extent, the teacher must make choices with respect to the general level of the class. This is especially true for the reading of poetry. The capacity to perceive poetry must not be underestimated, but usually only those poems should be paid attention to, that can be enjoyed without further comments. What is important is that the texts have something to tell the students, and develop their mental power, and that they wake up a desire for reading more (Skolverket, 1955, p. 71).

This approach (similar to the ones characterized by *l'art pour l'art* and *New Criticism*) can be related to a pedagogy focusing on children's experiences, emerging with the curriculum of 1969 (and continuing with curricula of 1980 and 1994).

The role of poetry in education

Of course, the question of the role of aesthetics has also received attention internationally. For instance, Bamford (2009), having studied teaching in 170 countries, found that the use of aesthetic forms of expression in teaching was considered rewarding in those countries. By using aesthetic expressions, teachers are capable not only of teaching specific subjects but also of bridging gaps by activating the students' senses and, in doing so, supporting their learning.

When it comes to poetry and poetry didactics, Wolf (2004) has summarized reasons for working with this by grouping arguments into three categories: *functional*, *emancipatorical*, and *literary*. *Functional* arguments are those that stress work with poetry for language development purposes such as working with grammar, text production etcetera while *emancipatorical* arguments emanate from the idea that children have the right to use their imagination and that, by doing so, they may be capable of "thinking out of the box" (which could be considered useful both for themselves and for society). Finally, work with poetry for *literary* reasons could be said to be "traditional" since the reasons for this approach emanate from the idea that our cultural heritage should be preserved by work at school.

Basing on praxis-oriented findings from Fenwick (1990), Brownjohn (1987), Svensson (1989) and Brekke (1986), Wolf (2004) makes the point that all these arguments overlap, and stress the idea that communication at school should include poetic language since this language reflects the variety of languages in use outside school. Similar thoughts have been expressed by Hall (1989), referring to a policy document pointing out the importance of poets' work, since poets could be said to work at the frontline linguistically. This interest in language and stylistics also mirrors the teaching of literature within teacher education (Thavenius, 2017).

To sum up, work with aesthetics has received attention in Swedish policy making for several decades. Worth noticing, however, is the move away from *emancipatorical* and *literary* arguments in favour of *functional* arguments in the curriculum that is now in use (from 2011). For the time being, knowledge of text structures is being stressed on the basis of writing research within the field of systemic functional linguistics (Halliday, 2003). When it comes to the use of fiction at school, work with reading strategies is stated to be important, while work with the arts could hardly be said to be prioritized in this curriculum.

The study – aims and research questions

Since the purpose of this study is to discuss whether students in teacher education consider knowledge of poetry worth achieving, and in that case why, the question of *agency* is crucial. The following research questions have therefore been raised:

1) What obstacles and opportunities might exist for student teachers, regarding poetry as a means of aesthetic expression?
2) How do the student teachers perceive their agency, i.e. the possibilities for including work with poetry in their future teaching practice?

Teachers as agents of change

Being able to act for change constitutes an important dimension of the teaching profession. After a few decades where the teaching profession has been de-professionalized due to prescriptive curricula, tests and inspections Priestly, Biesta and Robinson (2013) describe how teachers today should be defined as *agents of change.*

It is necessary here to clarify what is meant by agency: it is defined as an interaction between a reflective and creative individual, available resources and context. Priestly, Biesta and Robinson (2013) emphasize how important the phenomenon of *agency* is as well as what it means that teachers can act for change. They claim that there are several things that determine how an individual acts in a given situation. Priestly Biesta and Robinson suggest that the individual's social engagement and action in a given situation are influenced by previous knowledge and experiences and also by imaginings about the future, where thoughts about alternative possibilities can weigh in. A model that is relevant to this study describes three dimensions that affect the individual's ability to act.

1. The iterational element of agency (life histories and professional histories).

This dimension includes an individual's personal life story, their own education and their experience of working as a teacher. Previous thought patterns and ways of acting are incorporated into the current situation. The reactivation of these patterns gives stability to identities, interactions and institutions over time.

2. The practical-evaluative dimension

This dimension includes the individual's capacity to make practical and normative judgements by choosing among different ways to act in relation to demands, dilemmas and situations. Here there is also a distinction between:

a) cultural aspects – ideas, values, beliefs, discourses and languages.
b) structural aspects – social structures, relationships, roles, power, trust
c) material aspects – resources and the physical environment within which the individual acts.

3. The projective element of agency (in both the short and long term)

The current situation is also influenced by the individual's imaginative ability, such as thoughts, hopes, fears and dreams, seeing a future that differs from the past and present.

Priestly, Biesta and Robinson (2013) claim that all dimensions can hinder or enable teachers' agency. How a teacher acts in a situation may be due to relationships in schools or between schools and also relationships with surrounding environments. Other aspects that are important are the teacher's desire for changes in the short and long term, as well as their life history and education. They emphasize the need for a professional discourse that consists of teachers' own thoughts and reflections about achieving agency so that they are not restricted in their profession because of political influence.

Design and results of the study

Below we present the results of qualitative research, consisting of interviews with teachers being educated to work in the Swedish primary school. By an analysis of the interviews, aiming at capturing the variety of conceptions of poetry among the students and the role of poetry at school, we explain what kind of agency the student teachers imagine that they will have in their future work as teachers. We used Preistly, Biesta and Robinson's (2013) model as described above for the analysis.

The interviews took place at a university in Sweden in October 2017, with eight student teachers at the end of their teacher education program: four for the pre-school class to Grade 3 (F-3) and four for Grades 4 to 6 (4–6). The eight students involved in the study were first chosen randomly and then also according to the principle of accessibility. The interviews were about 30 minutes in duration with each student and were audio-recorded and transcribed.

The students were first asked some initial questions about their knowledge and experience of aesthetic forms of expression, both in school and leisure time. They were also asked about what they had learned and

observed concerning aesthetic expressions, like poetry, during their teacher education and what they thought about using these expressions as future teachers. Then the students were asked what their associated thoughts were when presented with some keywords, which made this an association interview (Christophersen & Ferm Thorgersen, 2015). The keywords were chosen from the syllabus in Swedish (Skolverket, 2011) as well as from a broader context involving both verbal and non-verbal languages (Liberg, 2007). The keyword selection was based on the idea that multimodal forms of communication and expression include visual, textual, aural and spatial resources. The students had the opportunity to make associations to a number of key words. The goal of such a design of the interview was to make the students reveal their preferences and thoughts about poetry and aesthetics from a wider perspective. A major advantage of association interviews as opposed to a structured interview was to see which keywords the students chose to talk about and how they combined them.

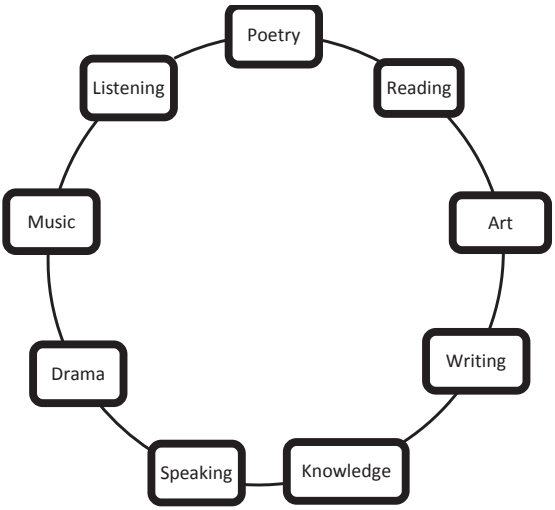

Figure 1. Keywords in association interview[1]

Participants. The eight students participating in the study are presented in the table below. Research ethical advice (Vetenskapsrådet, 2011) has been followed, and the names of the students have been anonymized. The

[1] The keywords, as well as all quotations from the interviews, have been translated from Swedish by the authors.

students were informed that the purpose of the study was to investigate their perceptions of the subject Swedish and aesthetic forms of expression.

Table 1. Interview participants

Name	Teacher education	Specialization	Aesthetic experience and interests
Maria	Lower primary level grades F-3		Music: upper secondary, folk high school [folkhögskola], university (musicology)
Vanja	Lower primary level grades F-3		– None identified
Emma	Lower primary level grades F-3		Drama, music: as leisure activities
Carolin	Lower primary level grades F-3		Music: School of the Arts
Alice	Upper primary level grades 4-6	Science subjects	Art: 2 years of teacher education in visual arts
Erik	Upper primary level grades 4-6	Music	Music
Karin	Upper primary level grades 4-6	Social science subjects	Dance
Jenny	Upper primary level grades 4-6	Art	Art

The analysis

In order to answer the questions about student teachers' perceptions of aesthetic forms of expression and what opportunities they see for using a form of expression like poetry in their future teaching, the interviews were analyzed using the content analysis method (Graneheim and Lundman, 2004). The empirical material in the study consists of the partially transcribed interviews. Content analysis involves a process in which patterns and themes in the material are identified by coding and categorizing the material. The material was first studied as a whole when we listened to and read each interview several times. Then the transcribed interviews were encoded and different categorizations (themes) were tested based on the students' statements. For readability, colloquial speech was partially maintained and pauses were noted.

Thereafter, the students' statements were analyzed based on a modified version of Priestley, Biesta and Robinson´s model about agency (2013) that includes three themes: *the iterational element of agency, the practical-evaluative dimension in an educational context* and *the projective element of agency*. The first category in this study is based on the iterational dimension of agency. This category consists only of the students' life histories because they have not yet worked as teachers. The second category is based on the practical-evaluative dimension of agency, which in this study is about cultural, structural and material aspects in the education context. This context includes the students' theoretical courses at the university as well as their teaching practice in different schools (VFU), where they have had an experienced teacher as a supervisor and have also taught themselves. The third category is based on the projective dimension. In this category are the beliefs and aspirations the students express about their future role as a teacher. The principal findings of the investigation are described in the next section. The results are presented according to the model's three themes in order to answer the aims and questions of the study. These themes highlight the questions about agency and the prospective teachers' perception of poetry and aesthetic expressions in school.

The iterational element of agency. The section describes the students' life histories. The participants demonstrated very different experience of aesthetic expressions. Only one respondent, Vanja, indicated that she had not participated in any aesthetic activities in addition to what is included in regular primary and secondary school. Most of the students, however, had experience of art and music. Two of them had even had education in music and art before they began their teacher education. The following comment illustrates the importance that aesthetic expressions may have for an individual's identity and development: "For example, music has made me another person" (Erik). According to Erik, his identity has been transformed through his life story and musical experiences. Other responses also highlighted the importance of aesthetic expressions. Some interviewees argued that aesthetic expressions enrich people and that these subjects are important for their own sake, as Maria said: "Being able to express themselves ... The way, to be able to get acquainted with aesthetics, as well, that's something that enriches you, I think." At school, aesthetics, according to Vanja, can add a lot, it will be fun at school, exciting, interesting and new things will happen*:* "I feel ... that you live more ... well yes, it will be exciting to go to school." Also, Carolin said that it would make life richer to be able to express oneself in many ways.

The participants who have their own experience and knowledge of aesthetic expressions outside of school reported that their own ideas about using these expressions had been reinforced in their teacher education. For Maria it was important to be affirmed that she could use aesthetic expressions as a teacher: "I have always had it with me when I have reflected on everything I learn ... because that's what I want with me so strongly in my teaching." A common view amongst the interviewees was that there was too little aesthetic content in their teacher education, which makes the understanding of such a content difficult. As Maria, one of the students, puts it:

> If I had not had this background, maybe it would not have been that much. I have heard from my classmates where there are not so many people who have the same knowledge as me that 'I do not know what to do, I cannot play, I cannot sing', that's the attitude. I have noticed that they have not received anything, that they could have ... received more about aesthetic forms of expression, how to use them.

The majority of participants agreed with the statement that they needed more knowledge and that they themselves had needed to try using aesthetic expressions during their education. In summary, these results indicate that the students' own life stories, containing their experience and knowledges of aesthetic expressions, are likely to affect their future agency, partly regarding their view of the value of these subjects, but also regarding their perceptions of how they can use aesthetic expressions as didactic tools in their future role as a teacher.

The practical-evaluative dimension in an educational context. The second theme is about the practical-evaluative dimension in an educational context and the students´ capacity to do practical and evaluative assessments concerning dilemmas and situations. According to Priestly, Biesta and Robinson (2013), there is a distinction between *cultural aspects* (ideas, values, beliefs, languages and discourses), *structural aspects* (relations, roles, power, confidence) and *material aspects* (the physical environment where the individual acts). The material aspects are not relevant in this study since it is concerned with student teachers' thoughts about future teaching. The interviewees' opinions on opportunities and obstacles when using aesthetic expressions are presented here, as well as examples of how teacher education contributes to students´ agency in using aesthetic expressions in their future teaching profession.

The cultural dimension. The students appeared to understand aesthetic forms of expression as different types of language to use when teaching. They stated that pupils learn in different ways and that variation is needed to keep the pupils´ interest. A possibility might be to vary the teaching methods. Vanja explains: "It might work very well if one lets a pupil…draw a picture... to support, and another reads a poetry book or a poem […] To show that there are different ways to learn." According to the interviewees, the pupils meet tasks they have not been prepared to solve when working with poetry. In their teaching practice (VFU), the students have instead observed a discourse, a norm, where the most important thing is to write correctly. Creative ways of working open up when pupils play, something that handouts do not offer. The students suggest different methods to generate interest and happiness when working with language development. According to the students, poetry is often a new genre for the pupils, therefore special preparations are required before they start writing poetry. Maria believed that pupils must be allowed to be free from the norm of writing correctly. She claimed that the pupils like to write poetry, and she saw them writing poems during the breaks. She pointed out one possibility in their language development: "they may… sort of… laugh together at their own silliness's, which they haven't caused by themselves but the words have sort of turned out like that." They learn the language when released from the demands of writing correctly and when enjoying themselves.

In VFU, Carolin had seen her supervisor teach poetry but language development was not an aim. According to Carolin, the teacher read some poems for the pupils and then the pupils voted for the poem they liked most. That poem was copied and glued into their workbooks under the headline "My poetry book." Carolin thought that the task was "incredibly meaningless" and that there must be other procedures including opportunities to play with words and language when teaching poetry. Vanja and Carolin mentioned language development in music as one example. When poetry is set to music, they observe language development: "One can learn language when singing … one can identify words and sentences while listening." (Vanja). When teaching rhythm in music, language development is included: "One has a language to express oneself in, and with music and art one can strengthen the message" (Carolin). It is interesting to note that only students studying F-3 discussed the issue of language development.

The structural dimension. The students studying in the upper primary levels (grades 4-6) claim that they were more aware of a discourse focused on assessment. They seemed to believe that everything, always had to be

assessed and they had been taught about the requirements of assessment. According to them written material was the only valid ground for assessment. Karin says: "So much has to be written to make sure that the teacher collects this material." Three out of four of the student teachers (4-6) stated that because of the difficulties of assessment, they might refrain from teaching aesthetic expressions. According to Alice, it is difficult to evaluate something that is expressed in an aesthetic form: "It definitely keeps me from using aesthetic forms of teaching." It seems as though the student teachers´ views of what grounds are needed for assessment are partly shaped by a discourse of assessment which they have seen in VFU.

Assessment was then viewed as an obstacle to the individual teacher. Erik assumed a role as assessor when he experienced a demand for strong evidence. He claimed that pupils can develop knowledge when using aesthetic expressions but the demands of assessment limits how they can show this. An obstacle in using aesthetic expressions when evaluating pupils´ knowledge appeared to be the need to please the school principal.

> But the reality for the teachers is reduced to assessing and strong evidence is required. The most suitable is to measure, to be sure. If the principal asks – you prefer to have something written on a paper to show – black and white – compared to having seen something in a drama lesson. (Erik)

The dimension of power is obvious when assessment is highly affected by being examined by a superior. The student teachers do not discuss assessment from the pupils´ perspective. Alice feels a need to work in a process-oriented way but then risked spending time and energy on things that will be impossible to assess. The students´ agency in teaching aesthetic expressions seems to be limited because they experience that assessment is required in every teaching situation. They even describe their uncertainty about how to assess poetry or other aesthetic expressions. The students´ experience from their education suggests that the requirement for assessment constitutes an obstacle to teaching aesthetic expressions.

Teacher education. Regarding the examinations in teacher education, the students also considered that they are following a discourse where only written material is a valid ground for examination: "When using aesthetic expressions, it isn´t taken seriously and if you are not very sure of how to work when you leave the teacher education there will never be a change." (Alice). According to Alice, there were no discussions about why students might

choose to use aesthetic expressions and what advantages and disadvantages that might present. The students wanted to try to use aesthetic expressions but they needed more knowledge and experience to do so. They also claimed that their views on assessment are formed by their own assessments in the teacher education program.

It was also important for the students to learn methods for how to teach and work with aesthetics. According to Karin, it is important to try using aesthetic expressions "You can DO it like this. Important to DO not just KNOW. We will act in the same way as we have done at university." Consequently, the students did not seem to have the agency to include aesthetic expressions. In this way, teacher education can be regarded as an obstacle to using aesthetic expressions.

When the students describe their experience of aesthetic expressions from VFU, they seem to agree on not having seen much. According to the students, one reason is that the teachers "are a little afraid" (Jenny) or that they refrain "because it leads to chaotic classrooms" (Alice). The students´ observations contrast with their ideas of their own profession and the way they want to teach or, as Carolin says: "If you are going to work with poetry, I think you should be able to work in another way."

The perception of the ideal pupil according to the curriculum seems to be another obstacle. Emma considers that school is adjusted to one type of pupil. The ideal pupil has to be able to listen, read and write, and do what the teacher tells them to do. Not every pupil acts as the ideal pupil and therefore Emma believes in working with aesthetic expressions: "Why not? Teachers in general are a bit scared of it maybe. It would be fun to try, and see how it works." Even if the students want to use aesthetic expressions, they do not have the agency, because they have too little knowledge in the field. Yet there are examples where the students have developed knowledge; one example is a poetry workshop from the first course in Swedish: "We had fun together and we tried different ways of working. That´s how you remember – I want to do the same. What we have got from the teacher education expands the idea" (Karin).

The projective element of agency. If we now turn to the last theme, the projective dimension, i.e. the students' beliefs, aspirations and imaginings about their future role as a teacher, it is clear that it is impossible to divide the students' aspirations into short- and long-term. They all spoke about an indefinite future. The section below describes the student teachers' answers about their fears and dreams regarding working with aesthetic expressions as didactic tools in their future teaching.

The students expressed their feelings regarding the use of aesthetic expressions such as poetry as a wish to incorporate it in their future teaching, but they were uncertain about whether they had sufficient knowledge. The feelings expressed alternated, often within the same individual, between fear, discomfort and insecurity to safety, comfort, willingness, dearness and inspiration when it comes to working with aesthetic expressions at school.

As Emma put it: "Poetry I am ... I have very mixed feelings about this. I am both a little scared and inspired to work with poetry (laughter)." As previously indicated, students' own thoughts about the teacher's role can affect their future agency regarding aesthetic expressions. Maria stated that she would like to be a teacher who uses aesthetic expressions in her teaching. She is critical of the frameworks she has noticed in use at school, for example when students write poetry from a predetermined template. Instead, she emphasizes that the pupils' expressions should be based on their own experiences. In order to be able to use aesthetic expressions, Maria said she wanted to work in a team where her colleagues also considered all forms of expression as important. Carolin believes, however, that a teacher who says that pupils should write poems "feels like a kind of teacher that you do not want to be, yes, one who is not the coolest teacher." At the same time, Carolin can imagine other ways of working with poetry as a teacher, she thinks it is possible "that you find a good way." These results suggest that there is a connection between the students' identities, their values and their thoughts about aesthetic expressions.

The majority of the students have no examples from their teacher education of how aesthetic forms of expression can be part of school work. Both Alice and Carolin emphasize that education does not confer any formal qualifications in aesthetic subjects. They do not think that they have acquired the tools to work with aesthetic learning processes during their teacher education, although it is expected that the student should demonstrate knowledge of aesthetic knowledge processes. The participants described a conflict between understanding the importance of using aesthetic expressions and not having sufficient knowledge to work with it. As one interviewee said:

> I would really like to work like this, but then ... how do you do it practically, or in practice ... that it will be, it's easy to talk about it, but then when you have to do it as well, it may be difficult [....] We do not get the tools to motivate pupils ourselves. It is not taken seriously and if you do not get it and have it in your bones when you come from the education, then there will be no change (Carolin).

> All students were positive towards working with aesthetic expressions, but they were also worried about not being able to do it properly as Carolin explained "It feels difficult, like I'm just going to pull it out of myself, now like this, ah, now we can work like this, I have no idea if I would do it right ... " (Carolin).

A common view amongst interviewees was that they would like to include, for example, music, art and drama in their education but they did not really know how to do that. Even if the teachers in teacher education have spoken about the importance of aesthetic expressions, most of the students themselves had not studied aesthetic subjects, and were therefore worried about not knowing how to use them as didactic tools. For example, Karin really wanted to do this but she did not know how:

> I'm afraid that when you start working then I'm afraid to go back to what it was like when I went to school, it will be as usual and comfortable – the pupils will be writing, afraid it's going to be so, yet conscious. [....] And then you think that, I'll skip it because I have to get a base for assessment here. Then you do not dare, I think.

The students also realized that even if you have experience in an aesthetic form of expression, it is a different thing to integrate it with other subjects in teaching a class, and that there is something else to using aesthetic expressions in teaching. Concerns were expressed, as indicated earlier, about realizing the importance of using aesthetic expressions but not being able to work with them. Karin believes she is confident in using aesthetic expressions herself, but she thinks it might be difficult to activate her future pupils. Vanja would like to include aesthetic expressions in all subjects to make her teaching exciting and alive, but she does not think that she has received enough tools to do that. She would still attempt to use aesthetic expressions in her teaching: "to dare to try, just like to see how it goes and .... not have so much pressure on yourself, you'll see how it goes." She thinks it should be fun, exciting and interesting, both for the students and herself at school.

It was also suggested that everyone could work with aesthetic expressions, regardless of education in these subjects, but there are different levels of security: "I think everyone can use it, but you would feel more or less comfortable" (Carolin). In contrast to this statement, Maria believes that aesthetics is something that you need to learn and that she wants more knowledge of it in order to teach. The majority of participants agreed that

they need more knowledge of aesthetic expressions because all forms of expression are important and support the student's ability to learn.

The majority of participants argued that an interdisciplinary approach is desirable in school, but that they had not thought so much about this question. Despite this, the students presented many ideas on how to integrate aesthetics with other subjects, but also how aesthetic forms can be integrated with each other. For example, Vanja said: "Poetry, music, drama and image ... eh, those parts I think that we can easily weave in with the others, because reading, writing, speaking and listening, feel like the basis." As a teacher, Vanja wanted to include aesthetic expressions as much as possible in all subjects "that you do not only have music during music class. You can listen to words and sentences". Alice commented: "To me everything is in everything – do not know how to explain. To get the chance to express yourself in a way that best fits you, image, writing, verbal." Only Erik, who has studied music during his teacher education, deviates from the others' positive attitude toward subject inclusion. He believed that poetry should be an isolated part of the subject Swedish, which he expressed as follows: "Now we write a poem. Difficult to say how to use poetry …" He has not seen any subject integration during his preparation and had not thought that aesthetic expressions could be used in other subjects. Unlike Alice who thinks that "everything is in everything", Erik says: "Music in music, art in art. Nothing else."

Through aesthetic expressions, the students expected that their future pupils would develop creativity and openness in general, which would make them open-minded as citizens. Some students also saw a risk that aesthetics would be too controlled, which could constrain the pupils' creativity. As Emma put it when she talked about writing poetry: "Because ... you do not want to control too much ... in order not to destroy their creativity, but at the same time it may be necessary because it is difficult." Emma also suggested that younger pupils were more creative than older ones: "the creativity, there is a tendency that it will disappear a little when you grow older, so try to maintain it." Alice also argued that "in younger ages, it is much more open with singing and dramatizing, painting, and then it may be considered childish and wishy-washy." As shown, the students have different thoughts about including aesthetic forms of expression in their teaching, which will have an impact on how they will act as teachers in the future.

Conclusions

To sum up, the above results show that the students' life histories (the iterational element of agency), their education (the practical-evaluative dimension) and their beliefs and aspirations about their future role as a teacher (the projective element of agency) have significance for the obstacles and opportunities they face in using aesthetic expressions. The projective dimension is crucial in the interviews: the students describe their ideas of how they wish to work as teachers.

They reflect upon their experience of teacher education, which either reinforces or contradicts their life histories and how they want to work. The students believed that lack of knowledge about aesthetics would limit their agency in several ways. They said that they were limited by requirements from the curricula, like assessment of the pupils, but they also saw opportunities for shaping their own way of teaching. Some considered aesthetic forms of expression as an important part of the teaching, while others did not consider themselves to had sufficient knowledge, or felt that they lacked interest in integrating aesthetics into their work.

When it comes to the iterational aspects of agency that are expressed in the students' answers, Wolf's (2004) categories serve as a starting-point for understanding the students' backgrounds. Here the students expressed emancipatory and literary reasons for using poetry, by explaining how reading and writing poetry may develop identities and enrich peoples' lives. No participant mentioned experience of learning poetry for functional reasons: instead poetry is described as being valuable for its own sake (cf. the quote above from the 1955 syllabus). However, from a practical-evaluative perspective, it might be said that the functional perspectives are present in the students' responses (cf. Bamford, 2009), as several spoke about work with poetry as scaffolding for learning – in all subjects.

A problem they stressed is the demands for evidence-based work, oriented towards "products" rather than "processes". The students also pointed out the need to develop knowledge about poetry, and skills for teaching poetry, during their teacher education – they felt that they were suffering from a lack of this. In fact, the students seemed to be looking for arguments that could be useful in dialogue with their future principals and colleagues for being allowed to make use of their own, personal experiences of poetry.

Finally, when it comes to projective aspects of agency expressed by the students, the most evident obstacle appeared to be a lack of self-confidence when it comes to reading and making use of poetry in the classroom. As though in despair, the students expressed a feeling of being afraid

of being trapped by the school system, in spite of their aspirations to work independently with poetry and other aesthetic expressions. Here, of course, teacher education plays a crucial role when it comes to educating students to make well-grounded choices for their future teaching.

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