GÖTEBORGS UNIVERSITET

The role of literature in language studies

- an effective means for teaching English

'Literature is a luxury; fiction is a necessity.'
G K Chesterton

Göteborg University/Department of English
Scott Edwards, 7305213378
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Supervisor: Ronald Paul

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ABSTRACT

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Author: Scott Edwards

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Institution: Department of English

Supervisor: Ronald Paul

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Summary: The purpose of this essay is to show how literature can be used as an effective means for teaching English in upper secondary school in Sweden. The chosen book for reference is *Blind Faith* by Ben Elton, which is discussed regarding its potential as a suitable source for teaching from a number of perspectives. For example, how it can be enjoyed as a book in its entirety, how it can be used for comprehension and how it can lend itself to other classroom activities. Secondary sources regarding the attitude and theory to using literature as a language learning aid are referenced. In addition to the theoretical secondary sources the syllabus, as well as the curriculum for non-compulsory school in Sweden is referenced in order to highlight the consciousness teachers should have in relation to the governing aims and objectives in their professional role. The benefits for using literature in the English classroom are presented and developed further a project proposal. The idea being that the project can function as a template for lesson plans over a period of time, beginning with literature and continuing with other activities related to the theme and features of original the source. A description of how the book should be dealt will be presented, including instructions for reading logs and writing tasks. Initial exercises concerning the book can be used a springboard for further study into cultural aspects of the UK for example. Various activities are suggested with the aspiration of creating meaningful learning opportunities that combine the four communication skills of reading, writing, speaking and listening.

CONTENTS

Introduction

Throughout the history of education there have been many different approaches to learning a foreign language. The reasons for this can be ascribed to contrasting opinions and different didactic theories. The turnover of approaches that have been witnessed within the teaching profession can be seen as a result of a change in theories and attitudes towards the objectives of the language being taught which has fluctuated between getting learners to analyse versus using the language (cf. Celce-Murcia, 2001:3). The English syllabus for upper secondary school in Sweden today is influenced by the Communicative Approach[1] where communication is the purpose of the language. Emphasis is placed on group work, integrating skills and authentic materials. *The subject of English plays a central role which aims to develop an all-round communicative ability and to broaden the perspectives on the diversity of an expanding English-speaking world* (skolverket). To be more specific, the list of criteria within the syllabus underlines the aim of developing skills in speaking, listening, reading and writing. The criteria in general are open to interpretation and although it states that pupils should have a good understanding of literature and the ability to critically reflect over different texts, the method, material and frequency of such is, however, discretionary. I intend to demonstrate how literature is a valuable source that can be used effectively in foreign language learning in connection with today's approach.

The purpose of this essay is to show how literature can be used as an effective means for teaching English with particular attention to the skills practised when reading but also how other communicative skills can be integrated. My chosen book for this assignment is *Blind Faith*, by Ben Elton and I will discuss the books potential as a suitable source for teaching from different perspectives. For example, how it can be enjoyed as a book in its entirety, how it can be used for comprehension and how it can lend itself to other classroom activities. For the purpose of

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[1] *The Communicative Approach* integrates communication skills rather separates them thus promoting a holistic use of the target language (cf. Celce-Murcia. 1991:8).

presenting an account of how this book can be used for creating lessons, this essay will not contain an extensive literary analysis in its entirety. However, where appropriate, some analysis will be presented in order to highlight the feature which is the focus of teaching as well to support a claim or an opinion.

There is much to consider when deciding on why, what and how to introduce literature in the language classroom, not only from a personal perspective but also a pedagogical one. Various lesson plans can be inspired by literature and I will present my ideas in connection with my chosen text. When necessary I will refer to secondary sources regarding the attitude and theory to using literature as a language learning aid. In addition to the theoretical secondary sources I will make references to the syllabus as well as the curriculum for non-compulsory schools in Sweden to highlight the consciousness teachers should have regarding the governing aims and objectives in their professional role.

In part one, I will begin by discussing some ideas regarding the benefits of literature in the language classroom and will follow with an account of why *Blind Faith* is a suitable example. In part two, I will develop my ideas further within my proposal of a teaching project. The idea behind the project is that it can function as a template for lesson plans over a period of time, beginning with literature as the principal source and continuing with other activities related to the themes and features of the book. Initial exercises can be used a springboard for further study into cultural aspects of the UK for example. A description of how the book can be dealt will be presented, including instructions for reading logs and writing tasks. I will suggest various activities that I believe both pupils and teachers will find interesting. My aim is to create meaningful learning opportunities that combine the four skills of reading, writing, speaking and listening. I will conclude with a summary of the chapters and reiterate why I think *Blind Faith* is a good example of literature that can be used in language learning and offer additional reasons for my claim.

PART ONE

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1. Literature and language studies

1.1 What makes literature beneficial in the language learning process?

On arrival at upper secondary school pupils will hopefully have had sufficient experience in intensive reading[2]. The various textbooks found in schools contain a wide selection of texts that expose pupils to advertisements, dialogues, lyrics, short stories, extracts from published literature, etc. Encounters with such materials are necessary for development of strategies that pupils will need to successfully read larger amounts of text such as a novel. However, pupils may not have had that much experience in extensive reading[3]; it is not uncommon for a class to reflect a variety of reading proficiency. This is a reality that teachers will be faced with year in year out and how this influences the introduction of literature is clearly a challenge. Nevertheless, the endeavour has merit in enhancing pupils' reading experience. While short texts offer the learner a great deal of practise in finding specific information, larger literary texts broaden the field of communication and open up a new world where component language skills are brought together in a complex process (cf. Celce-Murcia.1991:154). Reading as an interactive process, is a common expression used by specialist authors on language didactics. It can be best described as a process in which the reader utilizes various kinds of knowledge when moving through a text. When attempting to make sense of a text it is probable that you will use six different types of knowledge, syntactic-, morphological-, general word-, sociocultural-, topic- and genre knowledge, in order to decode as well as interpret meaning

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[2] Intensive reading involves looking carefully at a text to teach pupils strategies and familiarise them features of written English (cf. Hedge.2001:202)

[3] Extensive reading cannot be defined concisely, though when referred to in this essay it is characterised by reading a novel consistently over a period of time at school and at home for learning and for pleasure (cf. Hedge.2001:202)

of the language (Hedge, 2001:189). Foreign language learners may not possess the ability to simultaneously gather all of these elements due to a lack of knowledge in a given area. Therefore, practice in reading with sufficient guidance will help them become more fluent. How this relates to the validation of literature as a pedagogical tool is discussed further below.

Collie and Slater present a number of reasons for the use of literature and its benefits in language learning, it is valuable authentic material that provides a platform for cultural and language enrichment that allows pupils to get personally involved in their learning (1987: 3-6). Here follows a discussion of these reasons in association to *Blind Faith* as an appropriate source.

To begin with, literature is authentic material that has not been fashioned for the specific purpose of language studies. Textbooks often include a selection of materials which present the language bound in a particular discourse and pupils are '*thus exposed to a language that is genuine and undistorted*' (Collie & Slater.1987:3). Words shaped by the form of the novel, however, can be a valuable compliment as literary texts exemplify the language in use. Novels contain a more varied linguistic use than informative texts, for example, narration, colloquialisms, irony and satire. The language comes alive. It is through reading literature that pupils gain the opportunity to acquaint themselves with various linguistic forms and conventions. Ben Elton is known for his comic talent and his books contain a great deal of satire and irony. Therefore, reading *Blind Faith* offers the reader better opportunity in understanding the creative use of English than a museum brochure for instance. English literature is written for native speakers and through the reading of such materials pupils can acquire familiarity with the various linguistic uses and thus a broader understanding of the language and culture.

Literary texts provide an insight into the culture of a country. Thus, knowledge of society can be acquired through reading novels, not least in the context in which the characters are described. How they think, behave and interact can help you make sense of their person and social background. Although the world in *Blind Faith* is a fictional creation it still portrays a realistic

flavour of characters whose beliefs and actions reflect the social behaviour and cultural identities of real people. An obsession with fame and aversion to privacy are important features in *Blind Faith*. This is one reason why I believe this book is a good choice for pupils in upper secondary school. Its theme ties in well with the actual trends that can be seen in the UK and other countries, even if exaggerated. The words in the extract below describe an image of what it is like to travel on the London underground and a suggestion a junk food and chocolate obsessed public.

Trafford stuffed his own muted earphones deeper into his ears to try and shut out the noise, along with the sight of people's bodies and the smell. Sweat, perfumed toilet products and food. Above all, food.

The majority of people were eating as they shuffled forward, listening to their communitainers, staring at the video loop and pushing food into their mouths. It seemed that not a single sensory organ was in repose. It would be worse on the train, of course. Trafford was dreading it: A packed baking hot tin can full of people eating pizzas and burgers and chicken and healthy chocolate –and –cereal brunch bars. He took out an extras strong peppermint, the only thing that got him through his journey without being sick. Unfortunately it was becoming increasingly difficult to track down peppermints that were not coated in chocolate. Shop assistants found it inexplicable that he asked for them. What was there not to like about chocolate? (Elton, 2007:29)

This exemplifies how readers can enrich their understanding of the fabric of society even without having visited the UK. Furthermore, the cultural perspective creates the potential for further classroom activities that extend beyond reading. This will be discussed further in part two.

Another advantage gained through literature is language enrichment. Reading a sizeable text, such as a novel, allows pupils to appreciate many aspects of the written language. The range of sentence structures and variety of connecting ideas become more familiar thus allowing the

reader to appreciate both elaborate and simple use of the language. This is where syntactic and morphological knowledge help the reader understand the text. School workbooks offer a wide range of exercises for grammar, syntax and vocabulary, etc; they are purpose designed teaching aids with a pedagogical approach. Although they incorporate authentic materials, they are short in length (a few pages at most). The purpose of which is to train pupils in strategies needed for successful reading, e.g. guessing the meaning of unfamiliar words in context. Pupils can practise reading strategies in this way but only through extensive reading do they gain significant practise in operating these strategies more independently. (cf. Hedge, 2001:202). Therefore, reading literature can act as a valuable compliment to facilitate language learning. The language in *Blind Faith* is simple enough for pupils to understand the story but it also includes some elaborate usage and words which provide the opportunity for them to use strategies, e.g. deducing meaning from context. Pages from the book can be selected for comprehension exercises if so desired. Moreover, it might be required to do so depending on the proficiency of the class. Extracts can be used to analyse sentence structure, grammar, vocabulary, word classes etc. The inclusion and regularity of such exercises, however, should not interrupt the flow of reading. It could threaten the element of personal involvement; there is a risk of the reading becoming mechanical. The teachers' wish should be for all pupils to enjoy reading *Blind Faith* and it will require a certain amount of effort to appreciate the many features of literary language. Even if pupils do not realise the fruits of their labour immediately a great deal is learned under the surface.

Being able to understand and appreciate a book in its entirety is the number one goal for all pupils at all levels when embarking on a reading project. Most of all, literature offers the chance for pupils to become personally involved in the development of the story in a way that a purpose-written textbook does not. Through reading literature, pupils can examine thought and action with compassion, a reader can see life through the eyes of the character(s) when he or she has been able to connect and will consequently read with appreciation (cf. Read). Working with the

short texts that are presented in the schools current textbooks is, on one hand, necessary for detailed tasks that focus on a given skill, however a large text such as a work of fiction allows pupils to combine comprehension skills. Literature can be regarded as the definitive medium in which pupils are able to appreciate the language through entertainment. After all, books are read for pleasure. You do not necessarily have to like a book to achieve something from reading it; you can still give personal critique. In fact, being able to motivate why you did or did not like a book is an achievement in itself. I am aware of the close connection between enjoyment and learning and have therefore considered the potential that *Blind Faith* has. Of course there is a risk that not all pupils will find it equally interesting, but I believe there is enough appealing content in the book for pupils to establish a relationship with the text. Additionally, pupils' interest can be enhanced through other related activities. It is possible to learn later that you enjoyed a book more than you thought because of your afterthoughts.

A dominating attitude among pupils in upper secondary school today is that the literature teachers chose is not necessarily what they prefer to read. Evidently this poses a problem when the teacher chooses a book for the class, not all pupils share the same interest in reading. The chance of finding something of interest increases when pupils are allowed to chose for themselves (cf. Sundell, 2001:42). Regarding what pupils find interesting, similarities can be seen in both boys and girls preferences. Realism and emotional engagement are important components, however boys are more concerned with the concept of the here and now whereas girls and more concerned with relationships and problems (cf. Svensson, 2008:12). Consequently, when a teacher decides what literature to use in school he or she must consider the level of interest it has as well as the relevance to pupils' lives, thus tackling the first hurdle in engaging interest. Literature invites an emotional attachment and allows pupils to become personally involved. Books that are written in the perspectives of today's society will possibly lie closer to the present reality of pupils. The introduction of new literature must therefore have some advantages in the role it has within the

curriculum. Personal interest in the literature makes it easier to connect with the text and therefore facilitates learning as well as teaching. Working with a text from an earlier century can sometimes require a lot of preparation time because of its language or style. That is not to say that there is anything disadvantageous about this; working with older texts can be very interesting from a historical or social cultural perspective. I am simply pointing out that texts that are written today can be more suitable, it depends on what your objectives are. Almost any text can be interpreted as having relevance, even if it has to be manipulated; it is up to the teacher to find it. *Blind Faith* does not require the attention of translation into modern times; it already connects with the here and now. Therefore pupils may find it easier to read than a Shakespeare play for example.

In relation to the curriculum for upper secondary school in Sweden, literature has an important part in helping pupils reach the given goals. Pupils should *improve their ability to read with good understanding literature in English and reflect over texts from different perspectives* (skolverket). It is quite probable that a high frequency of reading must be maintained in order for pupils to achieve this objective.

1.2 Ben Elton's *Blind Faith* as suitable source for teaching?

To some degree, teachers will be bound by the materials that are available in schools. The school may require them to use the copies of literature from its own existing canon. Therefore, if recommending the introduction of new material you should be able to justify the reasons in doing so. I believe that 'new release' literature deserves its place in the English classroom as much as 'classic'. Literature in general provides a purpose for language learning in a variety of ways. Classic literature, on one hand, provides a historical record of the English language and it can be used for understanding a picture of the past and indirectly the present. However, literature from recent years presents a more modern picture of society. Seeing as we live in the now it is important to take a

look into current literature for the reason that young readers may find it touches them on a more personal level.

There will undoubtedly be a number of questions to entertain when selecting new literature to introduce in the language classroom, one of them being that authors are often criticised for the political or racial undertones that could result in a misinterpretation of your intention in using a particular book. As teacher you must be aware of your position of authority and clearly point out your reasons behind choosing a particular book to avoid being criticised for promoting prejudices.

Well known in Great Britain as a playwright, comedian and writer, Ben Elton's books are flavoured by his left-wing opinion and his critical eye to the world around us. In my opinion, that makes his books appealing for use in teaching. Promoting pupils to think for themselves and to critically view the world around them is one of the teachers' objectives. To a degree, the more controversial a book is the more there is to work with, more to analyse and discuss. Opting for a book that mocks the working class, as in *Blind Faith*, does not mean that I necessarily think it is ok to do so, it is more a point of provoking a reaction among the pupils.

There are many reasons why I think *Blind Faith* is an exciting book to use in the language classroom. Personally, I find it enjoyable and I believe in the contagiousness of being positive. Pupils are very skilled at picking the vibe from the teacher and if you present the book with an affirmative tone it can help create a collective interest. The book has many attributes that I believe teenagers will find interesting to read about. Given the fact that internet communication is a part of everyday life the theme of fame from the viewpoint of blogs should be something that pupils should be able to relate to.

1.2.1 A closer look at the book

Although the book is set in an unspecified date in the future it exemplifies many features of society today. In similar fashion to George Orwell's 1984, Ben Elton uses a description of the present society to mirror the future. Whether the story presents a possible conclusion of the Facebook, YouTube and reality TV fixation of today is debatable, but nevertheless worth entertaining. Is this in fact a possible reality for the future? i.e. a sex obsessed egocentric culture who have lost the ability and interest to imagine but are instead concerned with fulfilling their own reality TV life? There is merit in promoting a discussion about British society, including parallels with the rest of the globe. Elton makes a reference to America as *the beacon land across the Atlantic sea* (2007:108) suggesting that they are the society in which others follow. How true this is could be interesting to discuss.

Besides what benefit to language learning this book has regarding Collie and Slater's reasons discussed earlier it can also serve as a source for further study. The book addresses many elements of today's society and therefore offers a number of teaching opportunities from a cultural perspective. The book is set in London in an unspecified date in the future after the world has experienced flooding as a result of melting polar caps. It is abundant with colourful characters and descriptions of the living conditions in the given location. The issues concerning the shrinking of habitable surface area and overcrowding, cosmetic surgery, public sharing of emotions (representative of TV shows such as Jeremy Kyle[4] and Jerry Springer[5]), the right to be yourself, wacky names for children, unavoidable advertising (infotainment and communitainment) are interesting to discuss. They are just a number of topical materials worth looking at from today's

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[4] *The Jeremy Kyle Show* is a daytime television talk show distinctive for its confrontational style, which sees guests attempt to resolve issues with others that are significant in their lives, such as family, relationship, sex, drug, alcohol and other issues. (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Jeremy_Kyle_Show)
[5] *The Jerry Springer Show* is a television tabloid talk show. The show is ostensibly a talk show where troubled or dysfunctional families come to discuss their problems before a studio audience (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Jerry_Springer_Show)

perspective, not to mention from the futuristic fictional world described in the Ben Elton's latest publication.

This is where the focus on the book and further study will overlap with continued study. The book paints a picture of a society where each and every person constantly uploads their personal details to share with the local online community. What is more, everyone seems to be eager to know what is going on in everyone else's life and privacy is considered to be an odd concept. People are more interested in the real fabric of individual's lives and not the fictional world of books; they are no longer educated for such concentration.

Everybody knew that Before The Flood it was fiction that had been the principal corrupter of men. … Of that terrible time when society had been colonized by *made up people*. When the television channels had teemed with people *pretending* to be people that they were not! People who were the creation of a third party, *fictional characters*.- - - Then , thankfully, even Before The flood, a time had come when man slowly began to turn away from stories in favour of reality. A time when, mercifully, a new generation began to celebrate only itself, to watch only itself on television, to read about only itself in books and magazines… (Elton, 2007:48-49)

Regarding the extract above, certain parallels can be drawn between the book and the media today in the concept of reality TV and docusoaps. It is clear to see how the popularity of such programmes has increased in recent years. Furthermore, watching docusoaps appears to be a popular activity among teenagers (cf. Svensson, 2008.12).Given the knowledge that a personal interest in something facilitates motivation for learning, an investigation into the world of docusoaps is a good link between *Blind Faith* and further study.

PART TWO

2. Project

2.1 Introduction

The idea behind this project is that it combines the activity of reading a novel with other classroom activities allowing for the integration of communication skills. The project may occupy five to six weeks of the term, depending on the number and length of lessons. The primary objective will be to read the book and complete the associated tasks. Subsequently, the book is used as a springboard for further studies. I believe the book can be used appropriately for teaching English in upper secondary school in all courses. The individual components of the project can be adapted by the teacher to suit the course and pupils respectively.

Before continuing I would like to point out that I am not attempting to reinvent the wheel or claim that my idea is a superior alternative for teaching. Schools already possess teaching materials that function in similar fashion to my proposed project. Furthermore, the various accompanying textbooks and workbooks that are available for English are a product of pedagogical theories and research, designed by experienced professionals that can be used directly. Therefore, it would be bold of me to suggest that my idea is any way a more conclusive educational approach. I would rather present my project as a conscious attempt at creating fresh ideas for teaching and learning that can be a compliment to existing materials.

Much the same as a workbook can be used for lesson plans so can literature. Different components of a book can be broken down and focused on depending on the chosen objective. For example exercises for grammar, vocabulary, aural proficiency, etc can be drawn from the pages of a book. Granted, it requires skill and effort from the teacher in designing activities that could

otherwise be found in an existing textbook, but it can be worthwhile. It is a matter of how the teacher wants to work and how to get pupils involved.

2.2 Working with the book

In order to gain the benefits of using literature it is important that you present it in an appropriate way. Collie and Slater have compiled a resource bank of practical activities that show how literature can be used in the classroom (1987). I will refer to a number of these in my approach to using *Blind Faith* as a source for teaching.

When the whole class is working with the same novel for the first time it is a good idea to start with some activities to prepare the pupils for the reading ahead. It is important for the teacher to get the pupils interested in the book so that they enjoy continuing to read from start to finish, this will help guide and encourage them through the reading process. Instead of simply handing pupils a copy of the book and asking them to read it, a little time spend on introducing them to the text is necessary. A brief presentation of the author, synopsis, style and setting etc can give clues about the text and help pupils get into the mood before reading. But rather than lecture them they should be encouraged to contribute with ideas. The teacher's job is to use his or her own input to generate interest from the pupils and to keep the discussion on the right track. One good way of starting a discussion is for the teacher to write down some topic words and encourage the pupils to contribute with their own opinions in an attempt to build an understanding of the theme of the book. Afterwards pupils can work in pairs or small groups brainstorming on their own. Using the synopsis itself can help kick-start pre-reading activity. With *Blind Faith* we are told of world where everyone knows everything about everybody, pupils are already given an insight to the story and food for thought regarding preconceived ideas their expectations of the story. Even the title is enough to start a discussion, what do pupils understand about the concept of blind faith?

Introducing some of the character names and their relationship to each other is another way of starting a discussion. What do the pupils think about names such as Trafford, Cassius, Sandra Dee, Barbieheart, and Princess Lovebud? What preconceived images are created? How do they compare? Drawing attention to the hidden meanings in character names can help give clues about them. Understanding that Cassius is the name of a roman general involved in the conspiracy to assassinate Julius Caesar should give some hint to his role in the book for instance. Alternatively you could use some words from the text to create a discussion. For example, *fizzycoff* meaning physical office and *grug* meaning group hug. Would pupils understand these made up compounds? It might not be that alien to them considering the language used in text messaging and online gaming. The purpose of these introductory exercises is to initiate some interest and motivation for getting involved. Using details from the text might necessary in certain exercises but you should try to avoid giving away too much information; the reading should still contain some suspense. These pre-reading classroom activities give pupils an idea of what is required of them in connection with continued reading (cf. Svensson, 2008:28).

The first reading of the book should most definitely be done in class; therefore any initial problems encountered can be nipped in the bud. Reading should then continue as homework on a regular basis, with a number of chapters at a time in that coincide with planned lessons in order to allow room for assessment of pupils' progression. Keeping a log book during reading will be necessary for participation in the classroom exercises. A few suitable questions that will help pupils record their thoughts and responses are given below.

- Are the characters interesting, if so who? Why/why not?
- Do you identify with any characters, if so, how?
- Was there anything significant happening?
- Is the story developing as you had expected?

- What is your predicted proceeding?

- Any problems that you might be experiencing? Plot, language, vocabulary, etc.

- Write a brief summary of the chapter(s) you have read.

The reading log also serves the purpose for motivating reading; it allows pupils to have an internal dialogue in relation to the text. If anyone is having difficulty in understanding the book then it will inevitably affect their enjoyment and possibly kill their interest to continue. Furthermore, if pupils are not to up to date with their reading it will affect the group dynamics and it may hinder the flow of the project. Therefore, it is beneficial to recapitulate in class periodically. The opportunity for the teacher to explain and clarify any uncertainties can be found at these checkpoints. It can be anything to do with vocabulary, difficulty with characters, interpretation of events, cultural signposts, satire, irony, literary and historical references, etc.

At any given time, reading can be interrupted to allow for a discussion on the story so far and/or predictions for how the story will end. It creates the chance for verbal communication; it gives pupils the possibility to tell of their own personal opinions and also to contribute with ideas. Keeping a record of these discussions is a good idea for comparing with reactions to the actual ending. Performing a continuous analysis of the book is not the point here but rather a opportunity for the teacher to keep track of the pupils reading and offer guidance if needed.

Reading can be done both in school and at home. Requesting that pupils read an entire novel of 313 pages will be received with mixed feelings. There is the risk that pupils will be reluctant to even start. Therefore, using shorter texts, such as extracts, is an attractive alternative that has obvious advantages. Passages of text from a selection of works offer more variety while still giving pupils are a taste of the author's unique flavour (cf. Collie & Slater, 1987:11). However, reading an entire novel constitutes a more enriching experience that cannot be achieved through shorter texts i.e. development of plot, characters and personal involvement.

On completing the book pupils will be asked to carry out a writing task where they review the book. Having kept a reading log will help in the process of communicating their opinions and allow them to highlight what they found interesting. Within the review I would like pupils to communicate their attitude toward the representation of the world in *Blind Faith* and what they think about the concept of fame in relation to reality TV and docusoaps. Below are some questions that will help guide pupils with the task.

- What features of the book are relevant to society today?
- Which Characters did you identify with?
- What was interesting about the story?
- Was there anything you did not like about the story?
- Is the story believable?
- Did the story end as you had expected?
- Did you find anything difficult?

On completion of the written task the class can then move on to the further studies exercises. This is where the combination of proficiency skills will become more greatly integrated. Having already discussed the content of the book pupils should be well prepared for the following activities where the focus is shifted away from literature and onto broader horizons, however, still having a connection with the book.

2.3 Further Study

2.3.1 Cultural investigation

The book can be used to highlight certain aspects of British culture and subcultures. Ben Elton has a habit of parodying the working-class and *Blind Faith* is no exception (cf. Niccals). It is loaded with descriptions of social habits and personal tastes of people in British society, and there is little doubt that it focuses on the working class. What is he suggesting with names such as Gucci Kit Kat, Madonnatella, Strawberry Lovebliss, and Caramel Magnum? Who would name their children such names, is it acceptable? When the protagonist, Trafford, meets his Parish Confessor he displeases him with his rather conservative choice of name for his newborn, namely Caitlin. Although he swiftly receives praise on adding that her full name is Caitlin Happymeal, which is much more in vogue.

> 'And does the gorgeous darling have a name?'
>
> Well, we thought perhaps…Caitlin.'
>
> Confessor Bailey frowned. Formal, traditional names were not fashionable anymore. - - -
>
> 'Chantoria thought perhaps Happymeal.'
>
> You should listen to your lady,' confessor Bailey replied firmly. 'She has a clever head on those strong womanly shoulders. (Elton. 2007:20-21)

Parents' choosing to name their child after an item from a MacDonald's menu is a satirical yet serious observation of changing fashions. It also brings to attention the power of neo-colonialism. My interpretation is that Elton is not only making fun of Hollywood celebrities but also those who choose to follow suit. This is a trend that is growing and it would be interesting to learn about pupils opinions on this subject. Is it cool or just bad taste?

I would develop this particular feature further by discussing the idea of culture and identity with a focus on Chav culture as an example[6]. What, if anything, do pupils understand about the definition of this word? The word chav originates from British English but it does not mean that the concept or stereotype exists only in the UK. Writing chav on the google.co.uk search engine gives in excess of three million hits; there is evidently an abundance of research material for pupils to access. It would be interesting to investigate the equivalent in other countries. Pupils can be given an assignment on researching this concept as well as defining their own attitude to the word. They can discuss the chav image in other countries and if possible define a set of criteria for the equivalent in Sweden. I would suggest that this assignment be carried out in groups thereby promoting interaction among pupils and the sharing of ideas. Pupils can then present their research and thoughts in class and discuss attitudes towards stereotypes and prejudice. Apart from the entertainment value I hope this activity will produce, it also helps to integrate the responsibilities that teachers have in relation to the curriculum for the non-compulsory school system.

> Pupils shall also be able to keep their bearings in a complex reality involving vast flows of information and a rapid rate of change. Their ability to find, acquire and use new knowledge thus becomes important. Pupils shall train themselves to think critically, to examine facts and their relationships and to see the consequences of different alternatives. (Lpf 94)

By using the internet they will be exposed to a great deal of unofficial information and websites containing some strong personal opinions. It will be interesting to see what fascinates them and how they interpret the image of working-class stereotypes.

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[6] As defined in the MacMillan English Dictionary – chav noun *British informal offensive* someone, especially a working-class person, who is not well educated, who dresses in designer clothes and wears a lot of gold jewellery but whose appearance shows bad taste. (2007)

To conclude this part of the project the teacher can show some video clips from the internet[7] and also some sketches of Vicky Pollard from the TV series Little Britain. The regional accents in the video clips from the internet and little Britain have quite a contrast and given that there are no subtitles, this is a good lesson in listening skills. The dialectal slang used in Manchester and Bristol is very different. It will be interesting to see how pupils respond.

2.3.2 Reality TV and Docusoaps – the appeal of fame

Having an interest and curiosity in what is going on around us is a natural healthy habit. It is human nature to want to be in touch with your community both locally and globally. Literature to a large degree is a medium in which reality is represented.

> The written word is shaped by human nature and fiction is relative to how humans have
>
> evolved. When authors create characters they know that readers will relate to them. (Caroll.
>
> Lecture 18/11/2008)

Literature allows us to connect with the world in a fictional manner. For many of us, newspapers and television are the mediums in which we connect to the world. The internet is also a common medium for the exchange of information. In *Blind Faith*, Ben Elton comments on a nation who has become fixated with the true reality of life in favour of the fictional world. Anyone can see everyone online in a never ending show of reality. It is evident that Elton is focusing on the society of Britain today who regularly uses Facebook and Myspace to share every routine detail of their lives.

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[7] http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2WDnukuUc84
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=45805fzRcvM&feature=related
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pqyU2z-FJr8

The broadcasting of people's private lives is a winning concept for entertainment and TV ratings. I recently heard a comment on TV about why the *The Hills*[8] is such a popular show, "*we watch it because we love to watch them living the live that we would all love to be living*". Perhaps there is some comfort to be gained by enjoying the successes and failures of others which allows us to relate to on a personal level. Through reality TV ordinary people are given celebrity status and those who want to can achieve their fifteen minutes of fame through participation in reality TV shows.

There is another side to being famous and being popular makes you a target for gossip. No one should be foolish enough to think that fame comes without its downfalls. Take a look at the many gossip magazines available and you will see that among the pages of praise, there is also a fair share of criticism. Just the same way that celebrities are shamed for their unfortunate activities so are today's docusoap stars. In *Blind Faith* Trafford and his wife, Chantoria suffer severe consequences in the public eye when their secrets are revealed. As quickly as your claim to fame makes you an idol your secrets can turn you into an outcast. Perhaps their alienation could have been avoided if they had been a little more private and satisfied with being ordinary. Pupils should become sensitive to this reality and learn to be cautious about the choices they make. Teaching pupils to be critical about what they read, watch and hear constitutes part of the curriculum for non-compulsory school system (cf. Lpf 94).

We are all influenced by the society in which we grow up in and we are likely to see different trends within our generation. Values, ideals and norms change and how we react to them will definitely have an effect on us individually and collectively. It is important for pupils to develop a critical eye to the media and to become aware of the manipulative power that it has.

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[8] *The Hills* is an MTV reality TV series

Encouraging students to be aware of trends in popular culture and critical of their daily diet of entertainment is a positive step towards creating the articulate and selective audience of the future (Turner, 2004).

Teenage pupils today are concerned with the here and now; their reality is to some degree made up of what they see in the media. Therefore, an investigation into reality TV is an important lesson in developing critical skills.

A point of focus that I would like to draw from the book is the satirical look at the future and the ridiculing of what could be dubbed a "wannabee" generation. In chapter 14, a law is passed declaring every person in the country famous, to which there is mass hysteria and jubilation. *'Then you ARE famous!' the Bishop Confessor replied. 'It's the law and you can't argue with the law…'*(Etlon. 2007:109). Although it does not grant the wish of the entire population it is embraced by the majority. There is some degree of realism in this act regarding the past, present and future participants in the many reality TV shows and docusoaps broadcasted. People want to be famous and fame can be sought through reality TV.

The internet is firmly rooted in society and personal information is published by people all over the world on websites such as *Facebook* and *Myspace*, referred to as *FaceSpace* in the book, but to what consequence? Should it be that much of surprise to learn that in the future you will be considered strange to want your privacy, as in *Blind Faith*? Even today, you can feel left out of a conversation if you are not registered on *Facebook* for example. The hidden pressure to be one in the crowd can make you feel obliged to join in and sooner or later you may find yourself broadcasting your own life on pages in cyberspace. It can also be argued that personal web spaces allow everyone the freedom and opportunity to feel equally important.

Today's TV is loaded with reality shows and docusoaps and even though it could be argued that they have passed their shelf life they are still appearing on TV morning, noon and night. It is obviously a concept that sells because they would not continue to be broadcast if ratings were

suggesting otherwise. This concept of real people's lives providing entertainment is generally accepted by teenagers as the norm. Fame is appealing and it is easy to become a celebrity. For some, being popular is personal validity and popularity can be sought through fame. Even if you do not want to be a worldwide celebrity you can still be popular among the community of a subculture. In the book it is mentioned that you are expected by society to spend some of your time checking out other people's lives online because it is what everyone does. I would be interested to observe if pupils share this opinion.

A number of assignments will help motivate pupils delve deeper into this genre of entertainment. Ask them to analyse a week's TV schedule to see how much time is devoted to such programmes and how the different channels compare in their approach (cf. Turner, 2004). Using their own ideas they can create a concept for a new TV show and present it to the class. You can add another element to the lesson by showing portraits of people as pupils select them for their show and motivate why. To conclude this part of the project pupils can write a short text on the concept of being famous as well their opinions on reality TV.

2.4 Project overview

Working with the book

- Presentation of the book including preparation exercises, brainstorming etc.

- Opening reading to done in class, first by the teacher and then alone by pupils. This way any immediate hurdles can be overcome by help from the teacher.

- Reading log with instructions.

- Follow up lessons, check on progress, address any problems, introduce new exercises, discussion so far, reiterate the objectives etc.

- Write a summary/review of the book. Be personal and be sure to answer the questions.

Further study

(i) Culture and identity

- Chav, what does it mean, who are they, what does it mean to you?

- Look into stereotypes in general, working class stereotypes, social labels etc.

- Using photographs create a discussion; create an image for the characters in the book.

- Pupils carry out their own research on chavs, using the internet. In groups they present to the class what they have found including a compiled a list of criteria for an equivalent in Sweden. Images from the web and/or magazines can be used. Hopefully they will understand how stigmas are attached to fashion labels and see how it differs respective of country.

- Watch video clips and Little Britain, Vicky Pollard in particular.

(ii) Reality TV and Docusoaps

- Research the number of programmes on TV during one week, how much airtime is devoted, how different channels compare in their approach. Present results in class.

- Pupils create an original concept for a new TV show giving clear regard to the target group, how they will select contestants, etc.

- Select a number of portraits providing a good cross section of people and show them in a slide show while pupils' judge suitability for their show based on appearance alone. You can even include staff from the school and some famous people to make it more amusing.

- Write a concluding text discussing Andy Warhol's idea that everybody will be famous for fifteen minutes in relation to society today. Give personal opinions about reality TV.

Conclusion

This essay has contained an account of a project for use in upper secondary school using literature as a source for teaching. I have also highlighted the benefits in using literature and have connected the themes of the book to inspire further study. The thought behind the project is predominately to create a package in which the study of a book can be made more exciting. Linking literature with other activities allows for communication skills to be integrated. Concentrating on reading alone for an extended period of time can become tedious; by interrupting the reading for class discussions pupils are able to communicate verbally. It gives everyone the chance for input and output and the chance to see others perspectives.

Sundell points out the problem in finding texts that are interesting and thus he sees the benefit in allowing pupils to choose for themselves (2001.42). Naturally, this is the right way to encourage pupils to read on their own initiative and is necessary for individual development. The use of literature should not always be bound to a project it can also be included independently for pupils to enjoy by themselves. I have chosen to work with a recent publication and I have given arguments for why I think it is a suitable piece of literature in school today. I have deliberately avoided classic literature for the simple reason that the project should contain fresh ideas with the intention of creating an environment for learning in which pupils recognize themselves. *Blind Faith* is modern and it is very much in touch with society today. Above all, I would hope that pupils find it interesting since enjoyment should be the main objective in reading.

When looking at the overview of the project you will see that it is a template that could be applied to any number of books for the purpose of creating lesson plans and facilitating language learning. Granted it may need a bit of adapting, but generally you should find it universal. I may indeed find myself diverging from the plan on occasion, depending on what direction the classroom discussions take. If pupils show excitement and interest for a particular feature either

with or without connection to the book then it is an opportunity for the teacher to take that enthusiasm and channel it into meaningful learning activities.

Both teachers and pupils will have mixed feelings regarding the role of literature in language studies. Nevertheless, its inclusion does have some obvious benefits. Whereas oral communication is the dominant medium in which we communicate with one another, the written word offers a different language experience. With literature, language is visual; it is a world on paper. Imaginative fictional creation gives a reflection of the reality of human life, as given by different people. We read because we are curious to know about other people and books offer more than anything else. Teachers should encourage pupils to read and through using literature they will hopefully better their understanding and appreciation of the language.

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