



LUP

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Bachelor thesis

The Narrative Life of Frederick Douglass in History Teaching

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Abstract

This paper is about lesson planning in Norwegian upper secondary classrooms.

The thesis is as follows:

“Grounded in theory, how could one work with *The Narrative Life of Frederick Douglass* in the classroom while teaching the topic of African American history in the subject Social Studies in English?”

Research, theory and observations presented by Keith C. Barton, Linda S. Levstik and Alan Booth in books about how to teach history provide the main theoretical basis for this assignment alongside *The Cambridge Companion to: The African American Slave Narrative*, edited by Audrey A. Fisch.

What the researchers suggest are the pros and cons of different ways to teach are discussed. Reaping the rewards while minimizing the weaknesses is a constant underlying concern throughout this paper. A final, readily planned hypothetical 90-minute lesson, firmly justified by a theoretical discussion is the end goal.

Preface

My choice of topic stems from a profound interest in it. During work placement in my second year I got the opportunity to teach the topic, and thereafter I began contemplating writing about teaching American history in my bachelor thesis. Writing a bachelor thesis on how to use a historical biography to teach African American history in an upper secondary school setting is something I find both intriguing and daunting at the same time. The oppression of African-Americans is a defining topic of American history and carries centuries of suffering, bloodshed and inequality with it, giving me as a teacher-student an immense feeling of responsibility on how to serve the topic justice when eventually teaching it.

Introduction

The main goal for my bachelor thesis is: To properly plan a hypothetical lesson of ninety minutes where a historical biography is the main focus by taking relevant theoretical considerations into account throughout the process. Discussing why and how the research is applicable, and how that translates into a classroom setting will be a central theme throughout the text. Furthermore, how to supplement and compensate for potential limitations with using a historical biography in teaching will be discussed. An additional underlying ambition is to improve my ability to methodically plan teaching as a whole, and hopefully, some of the lessons learned will be universally applicable to other topics as well.

The bachelor thesis statement is articulated as follows: Grounded in theory, how could one work with *The Narrative Life of Frederick Douglass* in the classroom while teaching the topic of African American history in the subject of Social Studies in English?

The historical biography in focus will be the slave narrative *The Narrative life of Frederick Douglass*. The Narrative Life of Frederick Douglass will be the focus throughout this paper, and for the sake of brevity and avoidance of repetitiveness, The Narrative Life of Frederick Douglass will be referred to as *The Narrative* in italics throughout the remainder of this paper.

Important to keep in mind when reading this paper is the fact that there is no ultimate correct conclusion. The ambition is to arrive at a lesson plan, not *the* lesson plan. That is why I wrote could, not should, in the thesis statement. My bachelor thesis statement allows for a wide array of possible conclusions in the form of different teaching plans, all of whom would be soundly grounded in theory and within the framework of the subject curriculum. The ambition is to walk readers through the process of ascertaining what research says about teaching a historical topic and how said research is applicable to using a historical biography in teaching. A reasonable way to approach reading this paper would be regarding it as an in-depth elaboration on lesson preparation and how that translates into teaching a specific topic. Providing insight into what considerations and choices are made when planning lessons will hopefully both improve my theoretical awareness as a coming teacher, but moreover, make it an interesting read for anyone interested in teaching or slave narratives.

1. Material

The main material for this paper is *The Narrative Life of Frederick Douglass*. It was released in 1845. Released one and a half decades before The American Civil War, it became influential, and helped fuel the growing abolitionist sentiments in both the US and abroad in the years leading up to the war. Frederick Douglass went on to write *My Bondage and My Freedom* (1855) and *Life and Times of Frederick Douglass* (1881). Douglass is a celebrated American figure and “was the most famous African American of the nineteenth century and one of its greatest writers and intellectuals” (Staufer, 2007, p. 201).

2. Theoretical framework

The main theoretical basis for this paper within the themes of history teaching, slave narratives, and reading comprehension are the following:

History teaching:

- Teaching history for the common good by Keith C. Barton and Linda S. Levstik.
- Teaching History at University: Enhancing learning and understanding by Alan Booth.

Both books combine research with the observations of history teachers in surveys and interviews to not only demonstrate how to teach history, but why specific practices work. It needs to be said that Barton and Levstik focus on history teaching at an elementary school level, and Alan Booth on a university level. Keeping that in mind, plentiful of the research remains universally applicable, as will be explored in depth later on.

Slave narratives:

- The Cambridge Companion to: The African American Slave Narrative edited by Audrey A. Fisch.

Contains crucial insights into the function of slave narratives and their influential role in the abolitionist movement. Especially relevant given how Frederick Douglass is mentioned throughout the book, and has an entire chapter dedicated to Frederick Douglass' works of

Narratives. This book will presumably prove itself useful when interweaving the wide theoretical basis of History teaching theory with the narrower theoretical scope of slave narratives.

Reading comprehension:

- What Research Has to Say About Reading Instruction by Samuels, S., & Farstrup, A

Seeing how *The Narrative* can be considered a linguistically demanding text, ensuring oneself taking theoretical considerations into account is crucial. As the title of the book unequivocally states; this book offers an extensive theoretical basis in the form of numerous strategies to achieve reading comprehension suggested effective by research.

2.1 Curriculum

Social Studies in English – Relevant competence aims

The competence aims for Social Studies in English are divided into three parts: Linguistic, Communicative and “knowledge of culture, society and literature” (paraphrased). The latter part consists of seven aims, three of them especially relevant to the topic of African American history. Two of them are particularly relevant when it comes to working with historical biographies:

1. “elaborate on and discuss how key historical events and processes have affected the development of American society and British society. (Ministry of Education and Research, 2006)
2. “elaborate on and discuss linguistically demanding texts with a social or political perspective” (Ministry of Education and Research, 2006)

3. Method

The method I will use is qualitative research. The overall focus will be on getting a clear overview of what research says about reading comprehension and history teaching. This will be followed by a discussion of how said research applies to working with *The Narrative* in the classroom. Making sure that the lesson plan follows the blueprint put forward by the curriculum

of Social Studies in English will also be a constant consideration. The theoretical work on Slave Narratives will also serve the purpose of interweaving the more general theory of history teaching to Frederick Douglass specifically.

4. Cross-curricular teaching

The subject of Social Studies in English by its very nature offers self-evident cross-curricular potential. The opportunity for the pupils to further explore social- and historical issues of English-speaking countries while simultaneously getting the opportunity to improve their reading, communicative and writing skills in English not only cover the competence-aims of Social Studies in English. It additionally covers the competence-aims of English, social studies and history. African American history is a part of Social Studies in lower secondary schools in Norway, when the pupils are between the ages of thirteen and sixteen. As an example, they learn about segregation in the US in Norwegian at that point in their educational pathway. Social Studies in English not only offers the opportunity of revisiting said topic in more depth, but also learning more about it in English. The same goes for the history of slavery in America, in the form of working with slave narratives in the classroom. Texts that likely would have proven to be too difficult for most lower-secondary pupils.

5. Reading comprehension – What the theory suggests

In chapter three of the book *What Research Has to Say About Reading Instruction*, Billman, Duke, Pearson and Strachan writes about *the Essential Elements of Fostering and Teaching Reading Comprehension*). They focus on “10 essential elements of effective reading comprehension instruction that research suggests every teacher should engage in to foster and teach reading comprehension” (Billman, Duke, Pearson & Strachan 2001, p. 52). While all ten of them are important to keep in mind when teaching in general, some of them are particularly applicable to the hypothetical lesson plan this paper will present. The first point they make is the importance of building disciplinary and world knowledge. The level of relevant and pre-existing knowledge a reader possess about the topic of a text considerably affects that reader’s comprehension of said text. The evidence put forward suggests that “efforts to provide readers with opportunities to build domain and world knowledge support their subsequent reading

comprehension (Billman et al., 2001, p. 57). Keeping this in mind is crucial when planning to use historical biographies to teach history. Ensuring that all pupils have a grasp of the historical development of America before working with *The Narrative* will improve their reading comprehension. This will be elaborated on further in both the *Pedagogical Considerations* part of this paper, and also in the discussion part, in the chapter *Using the Narrative in the classroom*.

Another point explained in the chapter, directly applicable to a classroom setting is the point of integrating reading and writing. Research conducted by De La Paz in her *Effects of Historical Reasoning Instruction and Writing Strategy Mastery in Culturally and Academically Diverse Middle School Classrooms* made the discovery that the group where the teacher focused on teaching pupils' strategies "for planning and composing argumentative essays" outperformed the group where the teachers utilized a more conventional form of history teaching (Billman et al., 2001, p. 77). The first group "were able to produce significantly better essays, in which quality was indexed by historical accuracy, persuasiveness, length, and the nature and density of their arguments" (Billman et al., 2001, p. 77). This research was conducted in social studies classes and its findings will be utilized when contemplating how to craft and articulate tasks related to *The Narrative*, which has several excerpts highly appropriate for argumentative essays and discussions.

The final point mentioned in the chapter especially relevant to this bachelor thesis is: "Provide exposure to a volume and range of texts" (Billman et al., 2001, p. 58). Central to the subject curriculum Social Studies in English is for the pupils to be able to read English, which "involves understanding, exploring and pondering demanding texts, thereby gaining insight across cultures and special fields." (Ministry of Education and Research, 2006). Exposing the pupils to demanding texts is crucial and authentic texts serve this purpose. Using slave narratives to teach African American History meets the aim of pupils exploring demanding texts. Not only are they challenging linguistically, but their individual perspectives also offer some key historical insights and opportunities when utilizing them in history teaching.

6. History teaching – What the theory suggests

6.1 The four types of history teachers

In the early stages of researching how to conduct history teaching I made the discovery that there are four main types of history teachers. Quinlan, an American historian responsible for a survey and study of the link between disciplinary beliefs and pedagogic approach, identified “four discernible ‘types’ of history teachers, each reflecting a particular conception of the meaning of history, which he called relativist/reformer, storyteller, scientific historian and cosmic philosopher.” (Booth, 2003, p. 53) Quinlan elaborated further that the relativist/reformers represented the majority of history teachers. This is the type that considers societies to be a product of its history and makes that a guiding philosophy in their pedagogical approach to teaching historical subjects. They emphasize the importance of understanding history to understand the present and tend to be politically or socially reformist (Booth, 2003, p. 53). Upon reflection, it became glaringly obvious that I belonged to the relativist/reformer type of history teacher. The fact that I chose this approach placed me safely into the majority of history teachers. While it needs to be said that I am not a history teacher nor educating myself to become one, the theory remains applicable given the historic nature of the topic of African American history.

6.2 Narratives to promote perspective recognition

Utilizing narratives to advance cultural and historical competence offers some fairly self-evident advantages. The most obvious one would be the opportunity to immerse the pupils into the perspective of individuals from a certain era. Alan Booth quotes an answer in a survey of history teachers, where the concept of the pedagogical approach of “time-travelling” is mentioned: “The ‘time-travelling’: trying to enter the mindset of individuals in a different time, place and context, discovering in the process much about our own assumptions” (2002, p. 52). Entering the mindset of individuals is difficult to achieve from school textbooks alone, and supplementing teaching with narratives is a way of promoting historical understanding and providing the pupils with authentic texts. While a statistical and chronological grasp of historical events is important, it may not be the best way to get students interested in a topic. Speaking from my own experience, reading the witness account of Herman Sachnowitz, a Norwegian holocaust survivor made a far

bigger impact than the textbooks were able to. However, my discovery of Mr. Sachnowitz's book was due to the history textbook that included an excerpt depicting his family's arrival at Auschwitz. Consequently, a rather unmotivated and ill-behaved fourteen-year-old found himself reading the witness account of a holocaust survivor in his leisure hours. Admittedly, my experience is of an anecdotal nature, but I find it to be valuable nevertheless. As mentioned in the book *What Research Has to Say About Reading Instruction*, "the volume of experiences students have interacting with texts both in and out of the classroom significantly correlates with their overall reading success" (Billman et al., 2001, p. 50).

In regard to the approach of time travelling, an important part of it would be to achieve perspective recognition. Perspective recognition is the immersion into the perspective of individuals without letting your emotional or moral objections interfere with your historical interpretation. In the context of American history, condemnation of slave owners is easy and satisfying. It offers little value however when it comes to understanding why slave owners considered their practices morally sound. Therefore, the recognition of historical perspectives without letting your moral objections interfere is of paramount importance when reading narratives.

Thinking back to my lesson from my work placement, I firmly recall telling the pupils what to think and lecturing them on how the practitioners of slavery justified it, instead of allowing them to discover it on their own. Allowing the pupils to experience the perspective offered by an individual narrative, and then putting that perspective into a historical context on their own rather than the teacher providing them with conclusions is essential. As the history professor Roland Marchand stated: "In reflecting upon my own lecturing, I am troubled to recognize how often I wind up telling students what to think about the materials we have just covered – providing them with conclusions rather than empowering them to become their own historians" (Marchand 1999, as cited in Booth, 2003, p. 50). Promoting independent thought and ability to research a topic is a central aim throughout the Norwegian educational pathway. Making sure one does not "spoon-feed" the pupils the information, but instead empower them to make discoveries on their own is crucial in achieving said aim.

7. Pedagogical considerations

7.1 Behaviorism and cognitivism

Having established the importance of pupils achieving perspective recognition on their own when researching history, some conscious choices grounded in theory are needed in terms of how the material can be implemented in the classroom. The learning theory of cognitivism offers some crucial insight when it comes to empowering pupils to make discoveries of their own and equipping them to draw their own conclusions. The learning theory of cognitivism makes the distinction between information and knowledge. Information is transferable, while knowledge is something attained. Knowledge is attained through “the act of internalizing knowledge” (Siemens, 2005, p. 3). Going for the cognitive approach requires that pupils have existing information about a topic in order to process the new supplemental information received. Ensuring that pupils have basic historical knowledge about the US will then be necessary to start a cognitive learning process amongst them with the excerpt from *The Narrative*. To ensure that the pupils have a basic historical understanding of the US, I have decided to go with a behavioristic approach. Justifiable by precedent set by curriculum books in social studies, with their included tasks that are often centered around hard facts, where the answers either are either right or wrong. Tasks of this nature appeal to a need for pupils to have a reliable and safe framework to learn in (Erik Lund, 2001, p. 299). The historical development of the US falls into the category of hard facts with plenty of important pieces of legislation, key events and conflict to introduce to the pupils. Introducing the history of the US through a presentation with “right or wrong”-facts will work towards fulfilling the competence-aim concerning historical knowledge and equip the pupils for the upcoming reflection tasks on Douglass. It will also fit into the reliable and safe framework they are used to, before moving on to the more challenging part. Furthermore, it will work towards fulfilling the competence-aim of the pupil being able to “elaborate on and discuss how key historical events and processes have affected the development of American society and British society” (Ministry of Education and Research, 2006). Something the narrow timeline of a narrative will not fulfill on its own.

The brilliance of *The Narrative* does not come in the form of hard facts with “right or wrong”-answers, but manifest themselves through thought-provoking moral commentary, far more interesting for the cognitive approach in the form of reflection and discussion. Furthermore, the

competence-aim of the pupils being able to “summarize, comment on and discuss differing viewpoints on social and political issues” will also be worked towards. (Ministry of Education and Research, 2006). While providing the pupils with a historical overview serves the purpose of promoting an additional competence aim, it also improves their ensuing reading comprehension (Billman et al., 2001, p. 57).

8. Using *The Narrative* in the classroom

8.1 *The Narrative*: In its entirety or in excerpts?

Reading *The Narrative* in its entirety with its approximately 80 pages does require some hours. I found it to be a real page-turner and a profoundly captivating read. Loving to read as a teacher and being a role model for pupils in that sense and nurturing that love in students is important (Munden & Sandhaug, p. 309-310), there are however certain considerations to be made on how to get pupils into reading. Speaking as a formerly reluctant reader becoming an enthusiastic one, I truly want all of my pupils in the same situation to make the same transition. Ideally, every single one of the pupils would be thrilled by the prospect of reading 80 pages of Frederick Douglass. The overwhelming likelihood of that not being the case makes a conscious choice as a teacher necessary. Having the pupils choose their titles for extensive reading is essential in keeping them motivated. American children’s author Dan Gutman explains how he, someone who did not read books as a child, loves to write. “I just don’t like to read stuff that bores me. [...] The truth is that everybody likes to read whether they realize it or not. Because everybody – even the most reluctant reader – loves a good story” (Munden & Sandhaug, 2017, p. 311). On the other hand, as will be elaborated further on later, having all students reading the same material opens up for classroom discussions.

8.2 Classroom discussions

Classroom discussions promote several central communicative competence-aims in Social Studies in English such as for instance: “elaborate on and discuss linguistically demanding texts with a social or political perspective” and “summarize, comment on and discuss differing viewpoints on social and political issues” (Ministry of Education and Research, 2006).

Furthermore, taking another competence aim in the same subject into account, the pupils will get the chance to read extensively for another topic. The competence aim I am referring to is rather wide in scope and gives teachers the opportunity to offer their pupils the choice between vastly different major works of fiction from the 20th century up to the present. “Interpret at least one major work of fiction, one film and a selection from other English-language literature from the 1900s up to the present” (Ministry of Education and Research, 2006) Fulfilling that competence aim will devour large amounts of time. Managing time is one of the many challenges one faces throughout a school year as a teacher. The decision of working with historical biographies in an excerpt-form is necessary, allocating time for extensive reading for other topics, such as major works of fiction. By using excerpts, the door is opened for discussions in the classroom. Furthermore, the intention is to stimulate interest in Frederick Douglass among the pupils and hopefully get a few of them to read it in their leisure hours. Another perk of utilizing excerpts is the opportunity to delve straight into the most thought-provoking parts of the book, and that might very well help to spark interest in the class.

8.3 Selecting an excerpt

The Narrative is not short on interesting excerpts. It offers an individual perspective of one of the most infamous eras in American history. In a perfect world, the opportunity to discuss all interesting excerpt in this paper would offer itself. Given the confinements of a bachelor thesis in terms of word count, hard priorities have to be made. An excerpt where Douglass explains the solidarity between fugitive slaves in the context of the ‘bounty-hunter-climate’ in the North created by the Fugitive Slave Act, is an example of an excerpt worthy of classroom use. Other excerpts such as ones where Douglass reflects on the absurdity and inhumanity of slave owners sexually abusing female slaves and consequently profiting off the forced labor of their children most certainly could have proven fruitful in the classroom as well. Ultimately chapter seven drew the longest straw. Its potential for perspective recognition of both Douglass and his oppressor contributed to it being selected for further analysis.

8.4 Master and mistress Auld.

A profoundly thought-provoking chapter of the narrative of the life of Frederick Douglass is the 7th chapter, where he finds himself perplexed by the kindness of a white woman, Mrs. Auld. She was the mistress of Douglass' new owner and treated Douglass with compassion, and initially offered him a helping hand in his process of learning to read. Her kindness gradually declined after an encounter with Mrs. Auld upon his discovery of Mrs. Auld's tutoring of Douglass, "if you teach that nigger how to read, there would be no keeping him. It would forever unfit him to be a slave. He would at once become unmanageable, and of no value to his master" (Douglass, 1845/2015, p .30). Douglass then proceeds to elaborate on how Mrs. Auld due to the influence of her husband gradually transformed into an enthusiastic oppressor "My mistress, who had kindly commenced to instruct me, had, in compliance with the advice and direction of her husband, not only ceased to instruct, but had set her face against my being instructed by anyone else [...]

Slavery proved as injurious to her as it did to me. When I went there, she was a pious, warm, and tender-hearted woman. There was no sorrow or suffering for which she had not a tear. She had bread for the hungry, clothes for the naked, and comfort for every mourner that came within her reach. Slavery soon proved its ability to divest her of these heavenly qualities[...] She finally became even more violent in her opposition than her husband himself" (Douglass, 1845/2015, p. 32-33).

Douglass recognizing that Mrs. Auld in fact started as a sympathetic figure that recognized the humanity of slaves before being influenced, offers an insight into how humans are, in many instances, products of their environment and not necessarily inherently evil. If one were to dismiss her perspective because of one's own moral objections one would miss out on a key historical insight. Barton and Levstik covers this rather extensively in their book *Teaching History for The Common Good*, and they summarize it in the following manner: "Only by recognizing how the perspectives of people in the past may have differed from our own will we be able to make sense of their practices" (Barton & Levstik, p. 207). Gaining historical insight into practices of the past is crucial and there are some considerations to be made on how one could utilize this particular excerpt in the classroom.

9. Challenges

9.1 Perspective recognition in a multicultural classroom

First of all, Douglass clarity on the subject is astonishing. Douglass stating that “Slavery proved as injurious to her as it did to me” (Douglass, 1845/2015, p. 33) offers great potential for intriguing discussions and tasks. Slave owners were not victims. They were the economic beneficiaries and had the freedom to impose their sadistic impulses on all their slaves with impunity, as Douglass explains time and time again. Murderers of slaves faced no legal consequences. Despite being enslaved and experiencing the injustice till his 20s, Douglass still managed to make a nuanced and articulate observation on how Mrs Auld, in a way fell victim to the moral corruption of institutionalized slavery and how it gradually divested her of her “heavenly qualities”. Douglass managed the feat of detaching himself emotionally from something he had every reason in the world to be emotionally attached to and objectively recognize the perspective of his oppressor. It is easy to emphasize the importance of perspective recognition when studying historical eras from a safe and privileged situation, but the perspective recognition from a former slave gives it much-needed validity. As Milton Meltzer writes in his book *In Their Own Words – A History of the American Negro* from 1964, “Because history is written so largely by the people who came out on top, the history books have little to say about the human cost of the past”. The title of the book in itself encapsulates what is meant by “much-needed validity”. A teacher recognizing Mrs. Auld’s perspective does not carry the same weight as when it is Frederick Douglass himself recognizing it. Not only is it more valid coming from a historical witness, additionally, the ethnic aspect of it should also be considered. As a white teacher, coming off as insensitive or offensive to pupils when raising the point of recognizing the perspective of slave owners might be a legitimate risk. But Douglass’ clarity on the topic makes it easier to avoid said scenario. That being said, it is still very much a topic that needs well thought out and prudent articulation from a teacher to work properly. Considering the inevitable scenario of teaching a class where pupils have varied ethnic backgrounds, coming off as insensitive is a concern.

9.1.2 Being nice is not enough

Is the excerpt valuable enough to run the risk of offending pupils? Sonia Nieto writes about the bigotry of low expectations in *Language, Culture and Teaching*: “I have seen numerous cases in which “nice” teachers expected less of their students of color, believing that by refusing to place the same rigorous demands on their students of color as they do on white students, they were making accommodations for the students’ difficult home life, poverty or lack of English-language proficiency” (Nieto, 2010, p. 265). A “difficult home life, poverty or lack of English-language proficiency” is not the reason why said quote is applicable. Making accommodations for pupils by avoiding certain topics due to the possibility of them having experienced encounters with racism is not actually helpful or a ‘nice’ thing to do. *Nice is Not Enough*, the title of the chapter the quote is found in, perfectly makes the point about the bigotry of low expectations. A teacher being “nice” and not utilizing the potential of the excerpt about Mrs. Auld out of a fear of offending colored pupils is actually not a ‘nice’ thing to do, but actually demanding less of them, hence the bigotry of low expectations. Omitting the excerpt to “safeguard” pupils of color is patronizing and could send the signal of teachers expecting less of them in the sense that they do not fully trust them to take an emotionally detached look at uncomfortable topics such as racism. Thus, depriving them of the opportunity for perspective recognition in the context of slavery. That being said, consciousness of the difference in emotional impact among individual pupils can never be a bad thing, execution is crucial.

9.2 Depicting the era in a nuanced manner

9.2.1 The male perspective

One inherent weakness of working with Frederick Douglass in class is the fact that he offers a male perspective. Slaves suffered immense hardship regardless of their gender, female slaves however, had sexual abuse as an additional dimension to their suffering. As Harriet Jacobs stated in her *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*: “Slavery is terrible for men; but it is far more terrible for women. Superadded to the burden common to all, they have wrongs, and sufferings, and mortifications peculiarly their own” (Santamarina, 2007, p. 232). Frederick Douglass himself suspected and found it likely that he was the son of his mother’s master. Slave owners sexual

abuse and assault of female slaves, and consequently profiting of the slavery of their very own children was a common occurrence and something pupils should be made aware of. Furthermore, female authors of slave narratives often had to contend with skepticism in the face of the double negative, both being African American and female. “Jacobs had to contend with a skeptical readership that said her work could not be ‘genuine’ (Smith, 2007, p. 191). Not unlike Frederick Douglass, her eloquence posed the threat of casting doubt amongst the public of the truthfulness of her “claim” of being a former slave. That threat materialized itself. Unlike Douglass however, she had to grapple with prejudice and condescension because of her gender. Showing the difference in experience for male and female African Americans in this historical era will serve the purpose of giving the pupils additional historical understanding, and also a more nuanced view of the era.

9.2.2 Racism in the North

Another point worth mentioning in the hypothetical lesson is how Frederick Douglass struggled with racism in the north. While working for William Lloyd Garrison and the American Anti-Slavery Society, Douglass was paid far less than his peers, despite drawing the largest crowds. Furthermore, whenever “he challenged a white colleague, he was more often than not rebuked. Garrison and most other members treated him as a son or dependant rather than an equal, and when he asserted his role as a leader, they became incensed” (Staufer, 2007, p. 208-209). While Northern states were miles ahead in terms of progress towards equality, they were not a post-racial utopia. It is rather easy to fall into the trap of involuntarily whitewashing the record of northern states by focusing on the overwhelming dreadfulness of southern states in comparison, without exploring the shortcomings of northern states thus depicting the historical era in a misleading way. Not as bad does not mean perfect, and emphasis on this helps a lot in painting a nuanced picture of the era to the pupils. Including this piece of information in the initial presentation of the lesson would serve both the purpose of introducing Frederick Douglass and showing how racism was a problem in the Northern states.

9.2.3 Demanding text

Frederick Douglass intellectual capabilities continued to grow rapidly in the years after the release of his bestseller *Narrative*. He toured extensively drawing large crowds for his speeches. Those who experienced him speaking considered writing to be his second-best academic trait, a view shared by Douglass himself, “writing for the public eye never came quite as easily to me as speaking to the public ear.” (Stauffer, 2007, p. 202). Nathaniel Rogers, abolitionist editor considered him to have few equals as a speaker. “He has wit, arguments, sarcasm, pathos [...] His voice is highly melodious and rich, and his enunciation quite elegant, and yet he has been but two or three years out of the house of bondage” (Stauffer, 2007, p. 202). Douglass’ unique eloquence considering the brief time he had been a fugitive slave even led to some of his peers recommending he dialed down some of his eloquence. Douglass writes in his *Life and Times of Frederick Douglass* how a colleague told him: “People won’t believe you ever were a slave, Frederick, if you keep on this way” (Stauffer, 2007, p. 203).

Considering Frederick Douglass’ eloquence, and the evolution of the English language from his era to now, the possibility of the text being challenging for the pupils is very real. Considering the rich and varied vocabulary of Douglass, a way to facilitate reading comprehension of the text would be to include a dictionary of the words most likely to be challenging for the pupils. Commenced, pious and divest are examples of words found in the 7th chapter of *The Narrative*. Getting the pupils to read chapter seven in its entirety would most likely introduce several other potentially difficult words. A simple solution would therefore be to put up translations of words likely to be new to the pupils on the blackboard, easily available for them to look at whenever they stumble upon unfamiliar words.

10. How to articulate the tasks

Provocation to promote argumentative writing

When introducing the excerpt from chapter seven, having constructed tasks that allow for reflection and discussion is imperative. Given the emphasis in the curriculum on the ability to reflect and discuss, it is important to include tasks that empower the students to do so. The two tasks I have decided to give the pupils are formulated to achieve this. Moreover, utilizing

argumentative essays as a teaching strategy yielded results, as shown by the research De La Paz wrote about in her book, previously referred to in chapter five. The tasks are constructed and articulated to allow the pupils to be argumentative in their style. Instructing the pupils to answer the tasks with short essays of a half page will promote the strategy of argumentative essay-writing and at the same time prepare them for the discussion later on in the lesson.

The tasks are articulated as follows:

1. What do you think Douglass meant by “Slavery proved as injurious to her as it did to me”? Could Mrs. Auld be considered a victim? If so, in what way? If not, why?
2. In similar circumstances, do you think you could have been influenced in a similar way? Explain your answer.

Central to my wording of question one is the underlying intention of provoking the students into achieving perspective recognition. I remember talking to an English teacher, during work placement, in lunch hours. He mentioned that in order to achieve a lively discussion, he often found himself playing the devil’s advocate. He went on to explain that he taught social studies in a vocational class for the last two hours every Friday. In order to get the class to engage in a classroom discussion about the gender pay gap, he had to entertain the chauvinistic idea of the gender pay gap being justified in order to get the students riled up and participative in the discussion. He told me something along the lines of “I told the pupils that I did not believe it afterwards, but sometimes you get really desperate as a teacher when teaching classes reluctant to speak. If need to I run the risk of some of the pupils thinking I am a male chauvinist for two hours to get the students to speak, so be it”. Him putting the pupils’ needs first is something to implement in one’s own teaching and is one of the reasons why the word *victim* is included in the task. Using provocation to achieve an argumentative writing style is worth an attempt, especially considering how the group focusing on argumentative essay-writing outperformed the group focusing on conventional approaches in De La Paz’s research. Using the word *victim* to provoke an argumentative response among the pupils. And as a consequence, getting them more invested in the discussion in form of them wanting to express their disapproval and elaborate on why they think the notion of Mrs. Auld being a victim is inaccurate.

If said scenario materializes, that will allow for me as the classroom manager to involve the pupils that disagree in the discussion as well. I will proceed to entertaining the idea of the other side of the argument if there is a general sense of consensus in the class. A comparison that could be utilized to open the pupils' minds to perspective recognition is the comparison of children being raised by their parents to be racist. Do we sympathize with the situation of said children? If so, at what age do we stop sympathizing with said individuals and start holding them accountable? And while Mrs. Auld was an adult thus making the comparison imperfect, it still says something about how environments shape individuals. As Douglass stated, Mrs. Auld initially treated him in a warm and caring manner before the environment she lived in became the catalyst for her moral decline. Getting the pupils to reflect on and discuss how living in a southern state pre-civil war corrupted the moral compass of individuals would work towards perspective recognition amongst the pupils, and hopefully ignite a lively classroom discussion. Being prepared for all scenarios is crucial. Being able to entertain both sides of the argument is crucial in order for it to work.

11. Conclusion

The discovery of how many considerations that can be made regarding one single hypothetical lesson was perplexing. Moreover, the scope of the bachelor thesis had to be narrowed down several times. Proven by the fact that only one excerpt from *Narrative* was elaborated on in this paper. If there is any doubt in the reader's mind as to how the hypothetical lesson could be executed, here it is summarized:

1. 15-minute presentation by the teacher – Brief overview of important events in African American history
2. 45 minutes – Instruct the pupils to read chapter seven and answer the two tasks with an argumentative writing style. Explain how their answers will be the preparation for the discussion coming later. Emphasize how they should argue both sides of the issue.
3. 20 minutes - Discussion

The way the bachelor thesis statement is articulated opens for a wide variety of conclusions, so it needs to be said that this is one of many ways one could execute the lesson. This bachelor thesis, not unlike the profession of teaching, does not necessarily have a right or wrong conclusion.

Teachers are free to teach in a manner they deem appropriate, as long as it meets the competence-aims of the individual subjects. This freedom, however, should never stop any teacher from striving towards having a firm theoretical awareness in one's choices of how to teach. Ascertaining what research says, and how it applied to the classroom is a crucial part of being a teacher. Exploring how this applicability would manifest itself on a specific topic was what I wanted to research in this bachelor thesis. And also what I ended up achieving.

The lesson plan I ended up with is firmly placed within the blueprint laid out in the curriculum for Social Studies in English. Moreover, the lesson is also grounded in what theory and research suggests. Evident by my emphasis on creating existing knowledge in the form of a presentation before letting the pupils read the excerpt from *Narrative*. As research suggests, lessons structured in that manner improves reading comprehension, as Billman explained in *What Research Has to Say About Reading Instruction*. Also grounded in theory is how the lesson plan works towards perspective recognition in the form of Mrs. Auld's perspective, an important goal to achieve in order to make sense of past practices (Barton & Levstik, p. 207).

Using historical biographies in history teaching is not only a viable option. They promote competence aims, offer cross-curricular potential and are firmly placed within what the theory suggests is effective history teaching. Furthermore, as discussed throughout this paper, biographies should be combined with lessons about overall historical development. This to improve reading comprehension, and to compensate for the narrow timeline of individual perspectives. Ensuring that the following competence aim is worked towards: "elaborate on and discuss how key historical events and processes have affected the development of American society and British society" (Ministry of Education and Research, 2006).

Writing this paper made me realize the wide array of ways one could work with biographies in the classroom. Moreover, I discovered that one should work with biographies, given all the benefits they offer when coupled with pre-existing knowledge of the historical era they were written in.

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