The Relevance of Huckleberry Finn in today’s English Language Classrooms

An action research focusing on English as a second language

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Abstract

This study is an action research project dealing with the use of Mark Twain’s classical novel *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* in Swedish ESL classrooms. Our purpose with this project is to investigate how a teaching module on *The Adventure of Huckleberry Finn* can be designed to encourage critical thinking as well as address racial, societal and prejudice topics in Swedish ESL classrooms. The basis for this question is made up of several requirements stated in Lgr11. The research was conducted in three different classrooms, at two different schools, by two different student teachers.

Our findings show that Twain’s novel can be an adequate tool to meet the requirements stated in the curriculum as well as the goals for our project. Even though the novel was first published more than a hundred years ago, it is still applicable to our modern society. Most controversies surrounding the book has taken place in the US, but our study shows that it is significant for today’s Swedish students as well.

**Keywords:** reflection, racism, historical perspective, journals, observations, questionnaires.
Preface

This degree project was written by teacher students Alexander Johnson and Sara Ghazarian. All of the workload was divided evenly. This includes everything from choosing the subject, designing the project, gathering information and data as well as analyzing and writing the paper. One deviation is however that Alexander Johnson practiced this action research in one class while Sara Ghazarian practiced it in two classes.
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1. Introduction

This paper aims to investigate how Mark Twain’s classical novel, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, can be used as a tool in teaching towards particular requirements stated in the curriculum for English in today’s Swedish classroom. These requirements are that students should “reflect over living conditions, social and cultural phenomena in different contexts and parts of the world where English is used” (Lgr11, p.32) as well as “understand and interpret the content of spoken English and in different types of texts” (Lgr11, p.32). Furthermore, students are to understand and comprehend “literature and other fiction in spoken, dramatized and filmed forms” (ibid, p.34).

We have chosen to use the book *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* due to its status within the English canon as a classic text. The Swedish syllabus for English does not explicitly mention classic texts as part of the requirements. However, a classic novel, such as the one about Huckleberry Finn, is appropriate in relation to the requirements stated above – which we aim to investigate. The story and the characters do in some way mirror the society in which Twain lived. Another reason for choosing the story about Huckleberry Finn is that it has been critiqued and surrounded by controversy since its first release. Our belief is that by using a “problematic” text, such as Twain’s book, it can allow for and contribute to discussions in today's classrooms, due to its lack of political correctness according to modern norms and standards. We argue that the text is problematic e.g. in the sense that it uses a different language than modern literature. This means different restrictions and choices of words, which can highlight aspects and problems in a way that a book written according to today’s politically correct norms and values might not. This could give further insights into problems and topics which might be as current today as they were then. It could therefore add to students’ understanding and awareness to read a historical text from a more problematic time and place. In *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* the word “nigger” is used more than 200 times, which has resulted in it being banned as well as altered. At the point of its release in 1885 the novel had cultural significance and we argue that it still does today. The novel illuminates racial, societal and prejudice topics that further add to the “problematic” aspect of it. To this day these topics have been debated and the novel has been questioned due to its appropriateness in accordance with societal changes. Blum (cited in Lloyd, 2011, para. 7) states “[h]ow can we expect children to learn real history if we sanitize it for them?”

Through Action Research we aim to investigate the students’ understanding of the
novel’s content, Twain’s critical view on society, different types of language, and various dialects. Carey-Webb (1993) stresses the importance of not only showcasing the novel, but also to “[develop] student skills at challenging the classics and thinking critically about literature, history, politics and language” (p. 28). This, therefore, makes *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* a significant and relevant area of research. Furthermore, there are several different theories and interpretations considering Twain’s purpose with the book, and by some it is still considered an important and classic text in the English canon. The particular text used in our study is an altered and abridged version in order to be appropriate for the workload in accordance to the timeframe.

Our focus for this paper is as previously indicated the content of *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. The novel is used as a tool to discuss and develop students’ understanding of the content, as well as their ability to critically appraise it in accordance to the principles stated in the curriculum. The content is processed with consideration to the four language skills: reading, writing, speaking and listening, as requested of students according to the curriculum. This is done through a series of lessons with formative, as well as summative, assessment during our practice training occurring in three different classrooms at two different schools.

### 1.1 Definitions

#### 1.1.1. Classic

According to *MacMillan English Dictionary* (2007, p. 261), a classic is something that “is very good and has been popular and had a lot of influence for a long time.” Furthermore, it is also described as “[s]omething that is an outstanding or typical example of its kind” (2007, p. 261).

What defines a classical text is wildly debated to this day. According to Eliot, a “classic can occur only when language and literature are mature; and it must be the work of a mature mind” (Eliot cited in Acik, 2010, p. 57). In Eliot’s attempt to define what a classic is he makes the distinction between universal classics and classics within a language. Furthermore, he points out the importance of viewing literature “in accordance to the view of life of a particular period” (Eliot cited in Acik, 2010, p. 57).
A classic can only occur when a civilization is mature… It is the importance of that civilization and of that language, as well as the comprehensiveness of the mind of the individual poet, which gives the universality. (Eliot cited in Acik, 2010, p. 57)

When talking about classic texts, there is also the notion of “consciousness of something enduring” (Acik, 2010, p. 62) – basically meaning it stands the test of time. “[A] kind of timeless present that is contemporaneous with every other present” (Acik, 2010, p. 62).

Similarly, Sainte-Beuve discusses what it means when we call something “a classic”. He agrees with Eliot and Acik in that it is a text which is written in a most “refined and sensible, sane” (Sainte-Beuve, 2001, para. 7) way, but adds that it expresses “some moral and not equivocal truth” which the author expresses through his own “thought, observation or invention” (Sainte-Beuve, 2001, para. 7).

1.1.2. Canon
The definition of “canon” according to the Oxford Online Dictionary is “[a] general law, rule, principle, or criterion by which something is judged” as well as “[a] collection or list of sacred books accepted as genuine.” A canon is furthermore referred to as a “[work] of a particular author or artist that are recognized as genuine.” The MacMillan English Dictionary (2007, p. 210) talks about canon in a formal sense as a “generally accepted rule.” With regard to literature and art, canon may refer to “a list of writers, musicians etc. whose work is generally accepted or studied” (2007, p. 210).

According to Fjellestad och Wikborg (1995), the word canon was originally a result of the church distinguishing between orthodox and heretical texts. Today, however, canon and the canonization of texts concern “aesthetic value and assumed universality of their appeal that were evoked. ‘Great books’ or ‘classics’ formed a body of literature that allegedly represented the best ever written” (p. 154). The results have been that texts belonging to the canon are often considered as “the core of a liberal education” (Fjellestad & Wikborg, 1995, p. 154).
2. Thesis

2.1 Literature review

For our degree project we have examined four academic articles related to our subject, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* as a pedagogical tool in Swedish ESL classrooms. In addition to these articles we also incorporated a shorter article, published by *Politics Daily*, to elucidate the relevance of our topic, since it deals with the intermittent controversy of using Twain’s classical novel in the classroom. Lloyd (2011) discusses the new edition of *Huckleberry Finn* published in 2011 where words like “negro” or “nigger”, which appears more than 200 times throughout the book, have been replaced with the word “slave”. The article also problematizes the effects of doing this. Blum (cited in Lloyd, 2011, para. 7) states “[h]ow can we expect children to learn real history if we sanitize it for them?” According to the article, there is more than one way of looking at this issue. On the one hand, “nigger” is nothing more than a hateful and poisonous word which “has gotten more, not less, offensive over time” (Gribben, cited in Lloyd, 2011, para. 15). On the other hand, it would not be *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, nor would it be a just representation of American history and the abasement of slaves if such a significant element of the novel was changed. Even though there are geographical as well as cultural differences between Lloyd’s (2011) research and our action research it is still relevant since the Swedish curriculum states that “[e]ducation should impart and establish respect for human rights and the fundamental democratic values on which Swedish society is based” (Lgr11, p.9). Furthermore, it is stated in Lgr11 that schools should impart values concerning individual freedom, equality and “solidarity with the weak and vulnerable” (Lgr11, p.9). The benefits of using a text such as *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* is that it sheds light on these aspects as well as contribute to the values stated in Lgr11 about empathize with the values and conditions of others (Lgr11).

The first academic article that we have researched is “The Nigger Huck: race, identity, and the teaching of Huckleberry Finn” (Alberti, 1995). This text deals with the use of the word “nigger” in Twain’s novel and explores “the construction and maintenance of racial identity” (Alberti, 1995, p. 920). Furthermore, the article aims to explore the reason for this novel being a required text in the (American) classroom. It also sheds light on the contradictory relationship between Huck’s growth and his continuous use of the word “nigger”, as well as the readers’ responses to the controversial word and the implications for
the discussion of race in the classroom. Among other things, Alberti (1995) weighs the “learning aspect” of reading *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* against negative impacts and factors reading the book, as well as the representation of the different characters. This is interesting to us, since the article discusses and pinpoints issues such as the multicultural and multiethnic classroom, as well as the dilemma of what he calls the “sensitive reader”. Furthermore, the article addresses the issue of using novels such as Huckleberry Finn in classroom discussions about racial oppression and identity without reinforcing it. Sweden is becoming a more multicultural and multiethnic country, which makes Alberti’s (1995) article relevant despite its focus on the American society. Swedish schools are to develop students’ ability to “critically examine facts and relationships, and appreciate the consequences of different alternatives” (Lgr11, p. 11).

In our second article “The Dialects in Huckleberry Finn”, Carkeet (1979) discusses the different types of language and various dialects in the novel. By problematizing Twain’s preface in *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, where Twain prepares the reader for the “number of dialects /.../used” (Twain, cited in Carkeet, 1979, p. 315), as well as their authenticity, the article carries on to analyze them in depth. Carkeet (1979) focuses on type of dialect with regard to character and consistency. He also takes a more grammatical approach emphasizing phonological features and lexical features. This article could therefore serve as relevant to our research as an aid for enhancing our understanding of the dialects and different forms of dialects used in the book. According to the curriculum, students are to “understand and interpret the content of spoken English and in different types of texts” (Lgr11, p.32). Moreover, it could shed further light on the various grammatical features and deviations that the reader is subjected to.

Our third article “Huckleberry Finn in the integrated high school classroom” (Huff, 1997) is an overview of a paper dealing with the novel in the classroom context. In the preview, Huff (1997) illuminates *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*’s place in the American Literary canon, stating that “[t]he book’s farcical low comedy, pointed social satire, and apparent criticism of racial prejudice has earned it an established place in America’s literary canon” (p.10). Huff (1997) also sheds light on previous objections towards the novel, such as during the 19th century when “the very idea of using the poor, white son of the town drunk and a runaway slave as main characters in a serious novel was highly unorthodox” (p.13). Furthermore, Huff (1997) incorporates modern conflicts concerning the novel that has occurred in our constantly changing society. By using the text about Huckleberry Finn students are enabled to develop an understanding of the present through an historical
perspective. This to help students in their understanding of human rights as well as democratic values (Lgr11).

Lastly, our fourth article “Racism & Huckleberry Finn: Censorship, Dialogue & Change” (Carey-Webb, 1993), focuses on the history of the novel partly by incorporating Hemingway’s famous statement concerning the book: “All modern American literature comes from one book by Mark Twain called Huckleberry Finn... There was nothing before. There has been nothing as good since” (Ernest Hemingway cited in Carey-Webb, 1993, p. 22). The main focus of Carey-Webb’s (1993) article, however, is dealing with the difficulties of teaching the novel in the classroom. Carey-Webb (1993) informs the reader from a teacher’s perspective of his own experiences with the novel. Thus, we claim that even this article is important to our research. Carey-Webb (1993) illuminates conflicting ideas of Twain’s own opinions about slavery and his purpose with the novel by incorporating quotations from Satire or Evasion (Leonard, Tenney, and Davis 1992), in which writers and teachers express their opinions and “readings” of the novel.

"The high adventures of the middle chapters, Huck's admiration of Jim, Jim's own strong self-confidence, and the slave's willingness to protect and guide Huck are all, in some sense, rendered meaningless by the closing chapters, in which Twain turns Jim over to two white boys on a lark” (Jones, 1992, p. 186, cited in Carey-Webb, 1993, p. 25).

Even though the article is twenty years old and based on the American society, it consists of aspects that can be incorporated into our teaching. Carey-Webb (1993, p. 28) further claims that:

It is crystal clear to me that Huckleberry Finn should not be taught in a curriculum that simply showcases literary works without developing student skills at challenging the classics and thinking critically about literature, history, politics and language.

2.2 Aim and research question

Through action research, we will determine in what ways a classic text – where the author through his own invention “expresses some moral and not equivocal truth” (Sainte-Beuve, 2001, para. 7) – can be used to meet requirements in Lgr11. These requirements, which
this paper focuses on, are that students should “reflect over living conditions, social and cultural phenomena in different contexts and parts of the world where English is used” (Lgr11, p. 32) as well as “understand and interpret the content of spoken English and in different types of texts” (Lgr11, p. 32). Another requirement is that students are to understand and comprehend “literature and other fiction in spoken, dramatized and filmed forms” (Lgr11, p. 34). The Swedish curriculum states that schools should impart values concerning individual freedom, equality and “solidarity with the weak and vulnerable” (Lgr11, p. 9). Based on our own reading of the book as well as critique and controversy surrounding it, we believe that this particular text is appropriate for this purpose. By incorporating *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, students are able to develop and understand these values as well as the present through an historical perspective (Lgr11, p. 11).

In order to find out in what ways *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* can be a useful asset for teachers helping students reach the goals mentioned in Lgr11, we ask the question:

How can a teaching module on *The Adventure of Huckleberry Finn* be designed to encourage critical thinking as well as address racial, societal and prejudice topics in Swedish ESL classrooms?

### 3. Method

#### 3.1 Action Research

Among many different definitions of Action Research, Harmer (2007, p. 414) defines it as:

> Action research is the name given to a series of procedures teachers can engage in, perhaps because they wish to improve aspects of their teaching, or alternatively, because they wish to evaluate the success and/or appropriacy of certain activities and procedures.

Burns refers to Kemmis and McTaggart (cited in Heigham & Croker, 2009) when stressing the four central and essential stages for action research: planning, action, observation and reflection. Bell (2006) claims that action research is a perspective rather than a method or
technique. What type of methods used to gather the necessary data is dependent on what is being researched.

Burns (cited in Heigham & Croker, 2009) points out that “action research does not set out to answer questions that can be generalized to other classrooms” (p. 127). Action research rather depends upon its “trustworthiness” and how findings are presented as well as supported. This is often reassured through “triangulation”, basically using several different techniques when collecting and analyzing your data. When conducting Action Research the researcher should always be at the center of the research. This means that others involved are not so much objects to study, but rather participants in the research. Action research is a way of improving one’s own learning through action and reflection (McNiff & Whitehead, 2003).

Burns (cited in Heigham & Croker, 2009) claims that the relevance of using action research is that teachers become “agents” rather than “recipients” of knowledge within the field of education. This form of research may either be individual or collaborative, as long as it concerns the same social and educational context. This is also one of the benefits of action research, as it encourages dialogue with colleagues and other teachers.

Part of Action Research is to find solutions for what is not working as much as figuring out why things go wrong when they do (McNiff & Whitehead, 2003). As everything is circumstantial, judging from the situation or the surroundings, it might not be possible to do everything as planned. However, if we fail in finding solutions, we will learn from our mistakes as well as know what does not work and why. “The learning is what action research is all about” (McNiff & Whitehead, 2003, p. 72).

3.2 Observation

When using observation as a data-collective tool, experience is an advantage for perceiving the indefinite details. Conducting the actual observations requires a lot of planning. The need to determine in advance, what to observe as well as possible outcomes, is important according to Bell (2006). Furthermore, one should decide if observation is the most appropriate method and if other forms of documentation are required.

There is always a risk of involving one’s own interpretations when the observer chooses to participate and interact with the students during the observation (Bell, 2006). Observing without any direct involvement in the task, apart from giving the students the instructions, is one way of remaining as objective as possible (Bell, 2006). Another issue according to Hatch
(2002) is that you can miss out on information while acting as a participant, which needs to be taken into consideration during the analysis.

One advantage of observation is that it does not require a lot from the participants. “Furthermore, observations are relatively independent in relation to the individual’s willingness to contribute with information” (our translation. Patel & Davidson, 2003, p. 88). Another benefit that observation has is that, unlike questionnaires, it is possible to get an understanding of what actually happens instead of only getting the interviewee’s opinion (Patel & Davidson, 2003). One negative aspect of observation is that “[i]f data are only researchers’ impressions of what happened, then it turns out to be a study of researcher impressions of the social action observed, not a study of the action itself” (Hatch, 2002, p. 79).

3.3 Journal writing

Burns (cited in Heigham & Croker, 2009, p.118) claims that “[a]sking your students to write a journal could provide insights in to their perceptions about the issues you are investigating.” Furthermore, Burns (cited in Heigham & Croker, 2009, p.118) argues that “a journal is a versatile data collection tool that can be tailored to your research needs.” Our research uses participant journaling as “a strategic data collection strategy” (Hatch 2002, p. 140), which Newman (1998, cited in Hatch, 2002) states as a common method for action research. Moreover, Emir (1977, cited in Hatch, 2002) as well as Fulwiler (1987, cited in Hatch, 2002) talks about journaling as a part of the reflective process and a possible aid in making journal writing an interactive process through feedback (Hatch, 2002).

3.4 Questionnaire

Questionnaires can be seen as a form of interview. It is important that the questions are formulated and structured appropriately with regard to the participants. In the planning stage, one must also consider how the answers should be analyzed (Bell, 2006). Designing questionnaires require extensive planning, and the possibility that the participants interpret the questions differently should be taken into consideration. That is why it is common to use e.g.
open questions or category questions that could provide the participant with answering alternatives, as structured questions are easier to analyze (Bell, 2006).

According to Brown (cited in Heigham & Croker, 2009), one must also consider that the different types of questions chosen should be analyzed differently. E.g. are open-response items analyzed for its content rather than grammar or language being correct. Furthermore, what to look for when interpreting and analyzing the data are patterns that are revealing or interesting, which are often a relatively small number compared to the amount of data (Brown cited in Heigham & Croker, 2009).

4. Preparation for our Action Research

The purpose of action research is mainly improvement, which we discussed earlier. Schmuck (2009) talks about the major differences between action research and traditional research, making it clear that our work is about improvement and development on a local level. That this research which investigates the value of using the story about Huckleberry Finn in an English second language classroom is circumstantial and dependent on the perspective of the participants. Besides striving towards improving our own teaching, the goals for this research are as Noffke (1997) mentions to “produce knowledge that will be useful to others” as well as contribute to today’s educational situation and social justice in the classroom (cited in Schmuck, 2009, p. 31).

In action research the purpose of observation is to pay attention to the aspects that you are interested in. This can be done through several different methods, one being “other-observation”, which means that you observe others, often the students according to Burns (cited in Heigham & Croker, 2009). For this research, observation is incorporated to ensure the method of triangulation. These observations were mainly documented through what Hatch (2002) calls raw field notes, either made during or after class. One negative aspect of observation, as previously mentioned, is that the collected data runs the risk of being merely research impressions of a social action (Hatch, 2002). This was however taken into consideration and to our greatest degree we discussed our observations with respective supervisors.

In our planning stage our goal was to create tasks that would deal with and help students reach the previously mentioned requirements stated in Lgr11. When dealing with the novel,
the students were to use the content to “reflect over living conditions, social and cultural phenomena in different contexts and parts of the world where English is used” (Lgr11, p. 32). Furthermore, to “interpret the content of spoken English and in different types of texts” (Lgr11, p. 32), as well as show their understanding of the text, the students were to do so through various forms of tasks. With regard to each individual’s needs and to avoid stigmatization our design was developed through the four language skills: speaking, listening, writing and reading. We wanted the students to develop all-round communicative skills by practicing formulating their own thoughts and interact with others, in spoken as well as written English (Lgr11). A reading-, as well as a working-schedule was established for our students (see attachment I). Also, to strengthen our research, we chose to incorporate individual student journals (see attachment II). These serve as a data-collective tool as well as a reflective tool. The journals also serve to provide us with insights into students’ perceptions about the issues we are investigating. The journal questions were designed from Hatch’s (2002) suggestions about expectations being clear to the students, as well as clear directions about journal topics. We also chose journal writing to be an ongoing process to incorporate formative assessment and to activate the student in continuous reflective work.

The goals, the workload and the material were presented to the students during their first lesson in order to provide them with a clear understanding of what was expected of them. During this period we were prepared to alter and adjust our planning with regard to the students and the different classroom situations. Such incidents could be deviations in the set time frame, student absence or students having difficulties managing tasks.

The methods used for this research are partly observational, such as notes made by us during and after class. Patel and Davidson (2003) argue that observation does not require a lot from the participants. Observations are relatively independent in relation to the individuals’ willingness to contribute with information. Unlike interviews it is possible to get an understanding of what actually happens instead of only getting the interviewees’ opinions.

Furthermore, we use journal writing as a form of non-observational method. Students were also assigned a final task where they were to reflect and show their understanding of the novel. To conclude and further strengthen our research the students answered a written questionnaire regarding their work with *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. This served as a way of reaching an understanding of the students’ thoughts and opinions about the work that they had done and the fashion in which it was executed. In the planning stage, Bell (2006) states that it is important to design questions appropriate with regard to the participants, as well as to consider how the answers should be interpreted and analyzed. We have
incorporated both open questions and structured questions with answering alternatives. Moreover, the questionnaires gave us an insight to students’ perceptions of their own learning, as complementary to our observations.

As mentioned by Burns (Heigham & Croker, 2009), the method of triangulation, securing your data by using several different methods, is common while working with action research and is yet another reason for the particular methods we have chosen. Further discussed by Burns (Heigham & Croker, 2009) are the advantages of seeing teachers as agents in research and the collaborative work among teachers. For this research we are two different teachers, located at two different schools, working with three different classes. The collaborative action research method was therefore a conscious choice made by us to make our observations, reflections and results more trustworthy.

4.1 Preparation

4.1.1 Context
Our action research took place at two different secondary schools in the south of Sweden. The number of students at the schools are between 310 and 350. The classes consist of approximately 20 students and the pupils are between the ages of 13-15 years old.

4.1.2 Task design
As seen in attachment I, the design of our project consists of seven different lessons dealing with different topics and aspects from the book. When designing our project, Nunan’s (2004) seven different principles concerning task design were taken into consideration. As previously mentioned, during the scaffolding-phase, we gave the students a fair chance, by providing them with the goals of the tasks and with necessary materials and information. Otherwise, it will be impossible to evaluate whether the students failed or succeeded with their attempts of completing the tasks. The validity (what is meant to be assessed will be) of a task will decrease and it will be impossible to evaluate whether what is meant to be assessed is assessed.

Nunan’s second step, task dependency, stresses the importance of ensuring a connection between the different tasks planned (Nunan, 2004). By building tasks upon each other we argue that the students are given a clearer context as well as a better understanding of why
they are given the tasks. Correlation between the tasks also helps students reuse and practice previous information to hopefully enhance their knowledge, which the third step is all about.

During recycling, teachers have to provide the students with opportunities for learning and reuse words they have not yet comprehended (Nunan, 2004). In our project, this was integrated in activities such as continuous journal writing as well as oral discussions.

Active learning, the fourth step, is when the teachers provide the pupils with opportunities to integrate new knowledge into their own language (Nunan, 2004). According to Nunan (2004) learners learn best when they are actively doing something where they have to organize their own knowledge. He claims that when it comes to language learning, the active process needed is speaking and communicating, which our students got to practice on several different occasions. Lgr1 l stresses that “[p]upils should have the opportunity to take initiatives and responsibility, and develop their ability to work both independently and together with others” (p.11).

Integration is the fifth step (Nunan, 2004). In this step the teacher’s job is to stress the correlation between form, function and meaning. Nunan (2004) demonstrates it as follows:

The challenge for pedagogy is to ‘reintegrate’ formal and functional aspects of language, and that what is needed is a pedagogy that makes explicit to learners the systematic relationships between form, function and meaning. (p.37)

To enlighten the students of their own understanding while performing the different tasks, we made sure that the practice of grammar and meaning was not lost. This was done through continuous oral communication during tasks as well as feedback on the students written texts.

The sixth step is called reproduction to creation, (Nunan, 2004) and treats the aspect of having the students go from imitative language use to productive language use. E.g. to design tasks where the students have to produce something themselves, instead of only repeating what the teacher or a text told them. This is consistently seen and practiced throughout our project.

During Reflection (Nunan, 2004), the seventh and final step, time is being given to students to reflect over what they attained. This is necessary to explain why they are doing what they are doing and to make them feel that the lessons and their education are necessary and rewarding. This was the idea behind our final task as well as the questionnaires (see attachment IV and V).
4.1.3 Task description

We initiated the work with *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* by introducing the book and the author. Only a few students were familiar with the book from previous encounters. We presented and explained the novel and its time in history, followed by a 15 minute video clip about Mark Twain. During our first lesson, all the material and instructions, such as: the book, journal questions, reading plan and word list were also handed out to the students. Detailed lesson planning and description can be seen in attachments. Our purpose with this lesson was to prepare the students for the upcoming tasks as well as make sure they had the proper tools.

After viewing the clip about Mark Twain, the students were asked a number of questions regarding the content, to see what they picked up on and to discuss it. Topics brought up were among other things: origin of Mark Twain, his relationship with slavery, his career and family. At the end of class the students were eased in to the book by listening to the first chapter and following along in the text*. Due to the controversy around the book and its language, the use of the word “nigger” was brought up for discussion, as well as the pros and cons of using such a charged word.

The second lesson was dedicated to the students reading individually and answering journal questions targeted towards the content of these chapters (see attachment II). These questions were mainly about the plot of the story, a way for the students to get in to the book and the aspect of journal writing.

The following lesson began with the students being divided into groups of three or four. Each group was assigned a question concerning one of the homework chapters. Groups were created based on Harmer’s (2007) *Mandatory Participation Strategy*. According to this, students will assign themselves with numbers from 1-4. During the discussion, the teacher will randomly select a number when asking different groups for their opinions. This way neither the teacher, nor the student could predict who would talk and that forces the students to stay alert throughout the entire task. The topics of these questions were more complex than the previous journal questions and dealt with racism and moral dilemmas (see attachment II). In this situation the students were able to express their own opinions using the English language as a communicative tool, and furthermore reassure their understanding of the book. Following the class discussions, the students got to practice listening once more and moved on to new journal questions.

Lesson four included an alternative version of *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*,
where the language and word use were altered. The students were told to compare and contrast a specific chapter in both of the books, chapter seven. They were then told to write their opinions based on two new journal questions concerning these two different versions of the same chapter.

During the fifth lesson the student got to engage in yet another communicative speaking task. This time the goal was for the students to reach an understanding and summarize one of the homework chapters. This was to later be presented in front of the class and the purpose of this was for the students to practice speaking in front of larger groups, communicating with peers, practice their summarizing skills and help others understand the content of the targeted chapters. The lesson was rounded off with another journal writing session.

The sixth lesson started off with listening to the final chapters of the book and the students being introduced to the final writing assignment (see attachment IV). The purpose of the assignment was for the students to show their understanding of the novel.

The final and seventh lesson was also dedicated to the written final assignment, as well as answering questionnaires (see attachment V) regarding the project they had been working with.
5 Results

5.1 Observation

The observations used for this project are field notes made by us during and after class. Our observations were to our greatest degree further validated with our respective supervisors. As mentioned by Hatch (2002), our research question was always taken into consideration while observing our students to ensure that our research was on track. We also made sure to observe student emotions and how we adjusted the lesson plan according to the students and the situation. This much due to the fact that it is impossible to observe everything and to make our study more trustworthy.

Our observations show that in S8 and S9 both classes showed an interest towards the project from the start. In A9, students were initially difficult to engage and had difficulties speaking in larger groups. However, when involved in smaller group work, the students had lesser difficulties speaking and seldom resorted to code-switching. During discussions in a large group it was mostly the same students who spoke up every time. This became more apparent during presentations. Some refused to speak all together and some rushed through it. However, they did not hesitate to ask the other group members for help. The discussions prior to the presentations, when groups were to work together and prepare, worked well. Apart from a few students who would not participate, the groups were fully engaged and worked together with the content as well as divided up the work. They also helped each other so that everyone knew exactly what they were doing as a group. In both S8 and S9 no apparent difference between individual discussions or group work was visible. The students talked a lot, individually and when working together, also seldom resorting to code-switching. However, they seemed to be a bit more secure of their answers when working in groups.

Harmer’s participation strategy served its purpose in S8 as well as S9. The students liked the aspect of the teacher not knowing who would do the presentation. All students, except one in S9, answered the questions when called out. In A9, Harmer’s strategy proved less successful. In most cases the teacher had to resort to ask the rest of the group to help out, sometimes even the rest of the class.

The discussion about the use of the word “negro” in Twain’s book was held during the first class with both S8 and S9. Both classes voiced their opinions when singled out by the teacher and the majority thought it was good that Twain had incorporated the word, since the
book became more authentic to them that way. Some, however, thought it was wrong to include such a racist word, even if Twain himself was not a racist. Since most students in A9 stayed quite in the beginning, the discussion concerning the use of the word “negro” was postponed until lesson three, in the hopes of the students to have a better grasp of the topic. When the discussion eventually took place, the students acted as and treated the word as a very charged one – many students showed their understanding of the various pros and cons of using such a word, when it is appropriate to use and when it is not. However, though students did not see any real connection to slaves at first, many agreed that it could help in showing “how things were really like”, as they expressed it. Also, by using “negro” it was possible to show the conditions of a situation.

In A9, another aspect was that many students kept showing up for class without any material. In these cases the schedule and the rest of the planning that the students got helped. Those who brought everything were able to start even thought everyone was not there and the lesson had not “officially” started. That way no students had to wait while doing nothing. This problem was not visible in neither S8 nor S9.

It was noted straight away, in all three classes, that the students needed more time for journal writing, i.e. 15 minutes was not enough. During the project it became clear that though some students in A9 had no interest in writing or applying themselves, the students who did have an interest took advantage of it when more time was given. The same observation was carried out in S8, where more time dedicated to journals gave the students confidence in their own writing. Even S9 produced more reflective answers when more time was given. Also, going through the questions with the students before reading the chapters helped them in the reflecting as well as writing process. More time was not only preferred with regard to journal writing but rather the project as a whole.

Another observation was that all students seemed unfamiliar with the fact that they had to think for themselves as well as express their own thoughts and opinions. A reoccurring question among the students in A9 was “where they could find the answer”, trying to find it spelled out for them in the text. The students had to be constantly reminded of the fact that their own thoughts mattered and that these were much desired from them. In S8 and S9, however, the students gave more extensive answers as they became more familiar with journal writing. Students quickly grasped the idea of expressing their own opinions and really enjoyed it. This was also apparent amongst some students in A9.

During the final task it varied a lot between the students in A9 and how they handled the task. Some students got very involved and some procrastinated, or simply said that there was
no character which they felt comfortable comparing themselves to. When engaging with
students and trying to help them to come up with ideas, the students who were set in not doing
the task would not change their mind and start their work until the last minute – despite
having good ideas from the beginning. The majority of the students in both S8 and S9 started
writing right away. They all began with mind maps to collect their thoughts and include the
requirements in their writing. At the end of the first lesson all of the student had started to
write, except for two students in S8.

5.1.1 Interpreting the results
Our observations show that most students in S8 and S9 found the project most intriguing. In
A9, however, some students had difficulties engaging with the project. After consulting with
the respective supervisor it was apparent that the class of A9 had difficulties with not only the
subject of English but also in various other subjects. The students were perceived to have
“checked out” for the term and had no interest in applying themselves. A clear disadvantage
was that A9 had both of their English lessons scheduled at the end of the day, on a Monday
and a Tuesday. At this time the students were tired as well as unfocused. S8 in turn are
considered to be a rather advanced class and S8 as well as S9 have no known difficulties
speaking in general. With regard to speaking anxieties, this is also a known characteristic of
A9. While no students from S8 or S9 had these issues, apart from one student, A9 were
greatly impacted by this - which further affected the project. Though speaking in front of
others was less difficult in smaller groups, it became clear that planned groups were necessary
in A9 as many students got distracted more or less based on who they were working with.

The majority of students in all classes were able to understand the meaning of using a
charged word such as “negro”. During the project, the students also became more reflective
and showed more sympathy towards the black community. They were thinking more in terms
of human rights and equality during discussions of topics from the book. Many took offense
and some attempted to connect discussions from the book to their own lives.

One of our first impressions was that the project would benefit from a wider timeframe,
especially with regard to journal writing. The time given may have been enough for the
students to answer the questions, but more time would allow them to reflect as well as analyze
further.
5.2 Journal writing

When we designed the journal questions, our research question, as well as the previously mentioned requirements stated in Lgr11 were taken into consideration. These also made the common foundation that we used when our students’ answers were analyzed.

In all three classes (S8, S9 and A9) the majority of the students were able to touch upon the requirement where students should ”reflect over living conditions, social and cultural phenomena in different contexts and parts of the world where English is used” (Lgr11, p. 32). Many talked about the living conditions in the US at the time when Twain’s book is set, and some also connected it to their own lives and experiences. Most students could also prove that they had understood the book and that they could express their understanding in writing, which applies to the requirement where students are to “[u]nderstand and interpret the content of spoken English and in different types of texts” (Lgr11, p. 32). Many students in S8 discussed the different versions they had read and how the alternative version were easier to understand, since it was written in correct grammatical English and not “as it sounds”, as they expressed it. However, many S8 students and the majority of both S9 and A9 still preferred the more complex version due to its use of the word “negro”, which they thought had a more hands-on feel. They also expressed that the book had a more fun and detailed language but that the other version was easier to understand.

The third requirement taken into consideration is “[e]ducation should impart and establish respect for human rights and the fundamental democratic values on which Swedish society is based” (Lgr11, p. 9). As the novel revolves around many of these topics, most of the students (in all three classes) that were able to show that they had understood the book also touched upon these values. Some discussed it to a greater degree while some only touched upon it briefly, but all of them were able to mention something about the use of the word “negro” and carried some sort of discussion about it. “Twain has put it in the book for a reason, for the book to get more attention” (S8 student) one student claims. Another student states:

I like how he wrote what he wanted to tell like this, in some kind of a hidden message, instead of just saying it right on. This way makes you think more of how it was before and how awful the life were [sic] for some people. (S8 student)

Even the two following requirements: “[s]chools should imparts values concerning individual freedom, equality and “…/solidarity with the weak and vulnerable…” (Lgr11, p. 9) and “[e]mpathize with values and conditions of others” (Lgr11, p.9) were touched upon due to the
previous discussions. The students picked up on the injustice, or lack of respect towards the black community and empathized with Jim:

> I got a bit shocked when I read her statement that basically meant that negroes aren’t people. But I think its [sic] good to have that in the book because it shows the reader how racist or just plain uneducated people were back then. (S8 student)

Many also picked up on the unequal relationship between especially Tom (but sometimes even Huck) and Jim. A common remark looked like: “I think he’s [Jim] portrayed as the ‘helpless’, the one who needs saving like princesses in old tales. He’s trapped in the cabin, depending on Huck and Tom’s help” (S9 student). They understood the “wrong” in how the society thought back then and mentioned why it is wrong to use such a harsh word as “nigger” or “negro”. Some, however, talked about pros and cons of it existing frequently in the book.

> It is respect less to not use the word ‘negro’ because people should know and remember that it was like this at that time. The book has no problem with ‘negroes’. I feel that it’s the opposite because Huck saves a slave and it proves that he didn’t want him to be a slave and instead live a happy life. (S9 student)

Opinions like this were the most common among the students, but some expressed another aspect of the use of the word saying: “It feels kind of censured when you read the word slave. But because a lot of people is [sic] moved and find the word negro offensive I think its [sic] good that they have alternatives for the word” (A9 student).

> Furthermore, Swedish schools are to develop students’ ability to “/…/critically examine facts and relationships, and appreciate the consequences of different alternatives” (Lgr11, p. 11). This was not heavily examined by the students in any of the classes, but they did mention the difference in general between the black and the white community. The relationship between Huck and Jim was also brought up for discussion, as well as the different use of language between the characters. Common thoughts and opinions were that the more complex version appeared more authentic, which to many made it more interesting.

Both Huck’s and Jim’s language is a bit less modern, by that I mean they speak more of a suburb dialect or some village dialect outside of the capital. The Duke’s and the King’s dialect is clearly british [sic], as we heard on the recording. They are also quite eloquent, something that Huck and Jim lacks often using shortened words and incorrect grammar. (S9 student)
The students in S9 and A9 also took the discussion a bit further than S8 and related different scenarios to themselves and their everyday lives.

Our last requirement state that “[s]tudents should develop an understanding of the present through an historical perspective” (Lgr11, p. 11) and this was fulfilled by the majority of the students in all three classes when discussing the societal changes in how black people were and are being treated, as well as relating it to values in today’s society. “Judging from this, she obviously do [sic] not consider all humans people. /.../I’ve been raised in a time when slavery is considered to be utmost disgusting, and when the word negro is taboo”. (A9 student). Though many students were able to carry good discussions about the abasement of the black community, none acknowledged any other groups as such. However, there was an apparent notion of the students believing that everyone should be treated equally no matter skin-color, religion or gender. Some students saw a parable between Twain's society and their own modern society saying that the judgmental and prejudice attitude still exist and that people are still being judged based on this.

Sure, we got rid of those ridiculous racial thoughts, but we always kept our judgmental mindset. Instead of judging people by their skin color, we now judge them based of [sic] how they dress, how they look, and how successful they are. /.../That’s why I think we are all like Jim in a way, because we are all being judged for the wrong things. (S9 student)

Aside from in their journal writing, our students were given opportunities to reflect and show their own opinions in both group discussions, but also in the final task (see Attachment IV) where they were to describe a character from the book and compare him/her to themselves. This task functioned as an extended journal writing session, due to its reflective nature. The majority of the students went into depth when comparing a character from the book to themselves. These two examples are from students talking about the character Jim: “All in all, he’s almost the perfect hero for the story – except he’s not, he's rather the subject.” (A9 student). Another student came to a wistful conclusion stating: “Huck is maybe the nicest person in the whole text, and that’s sad because even Huck is a little bit of a racist”. (S9 student).

5.2.1 Interpreting the results
The results show that the majority in all three classes have been able to touch upon the requirements that the questions were based on. The majority could also prove an
understanding of both the content of the novel as well as express, argue and exemplify this understanding in writing. However, all classes would probably have benefitted even more if the pace was a bit slower. Many aspects are brought up in this project and a bit more time could benefit the students further. More time for journal questions would probably lead to even more reflective answers. Unfortunately we were only given four weeks of VFT and tried to make the best of the situation given. In the future, however, an additional one or two weeks would be preferable.

The majority in all three classes touched upon the historical perspective. However, we argue that this could probably have been to a greater extent and deeper level if we had empathized it more in relation to racial, societal and prejudice issues.

5.3 Questionnaires

When we created the questionnaire, the purpose was to provide us with insights into what the students thought about the project as well as how well they thought it functioned. We were also interested in finding out what our students thought about the different work constellations and methods that were included in our design. Our interest is to find out how a teaching module on The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn can be designed to encourage critical thinking as well as address racial, societal and prejudice topics in Swedish ESL classrooms. Therefore, the students own thoughts on how they perceived it, or what they thought benefitted them versus disrupted their learning, was important. The questionnaires were filled out by all three classes: class S8, S9 and A9.

The questionnaires show that most students thought of the project to be more interesting rather than fun but coincidently, the answers indicated an average of the project being “OK” on the fun-scale. Very few students perceived the project as boring and with regard to tempo, i.e. workload versus time given, the majority deemed it to be OK. However, there is a visible difference between year eight and year nine students as well as between the two schools. S8 had an “interesting”-average of 5.9, whereas S9 had 8.2 and A9 had 6.3. Several students in year eight made remarks about the book to be a bit difficult and three students further expressed that the book was boring. This might have to do with the level of maturity, however, our impression is that more time would benefit the students and might prevent this. Nevertheless, the answers show that the design of our project, such as the teacher adapting or the possibility to work in groups, made it easier as well as more understandable for the
students according to themselves. Many still acknowledged that it was an interesting read, whereas one student added that it was good to have read “a classic”. Despite the lack of interest in the novel itself many students said that they understood the benefits of reading such a book.

Students in year nine gave an overall impression of the project to be both interesting as well as fun. Many students commented on the tempo, saying that sometimes it felt as if it went a bit fast but overall it was good. Comments stated that the book was a little difficult but that the high pace allowed for efficient work as well as motivating and challenging the students. Few students gave a negative impression, saying that it was tiresome to “read all the time” or doing the same thing every lesson. However, most students found the project to be rewarding and that it differed from how they usually work, adding that more time to write was preferred. “Hate it when things move too slow so this was good. Challenging questions with good response was motivating” (S9, our translation).

As shown by the diagrams below, there is a difference between how well year eight and nine students perceived the various tasks and assignments to have been introduced and explained. Year nine students found it to have been presented clearer compared to the students from year eight and this divergence corresponds with the previous section.

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<th>S8</th>
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<td>How do you think the instructions and the goals concerning the tasks have been described and explained? Circle your answer.</td>
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<td>Snitt: 4.7</td>
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<td>OK</td>
<td>Unclear</td>
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<tr>
<td>How do you think the instructions and the goals concerning the tasks have been described and explained? Circle your answer.</td>
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<td>Snitt: 2.9</td>
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The majority of year eight students had some difficulties understanding questions or instructions. Four students commented on the fact that combining different ways of delivering the instructions made it much clearer, such as oral- combined with written instructions, as well as posting them on the whiteboard. Some students expressed that they felt the need to ask for further guidance or that they understood eventually. However, there were a few students who said that the book in itself made it more difficult to understand tasks. Students from year nine differed and said that instructions, task as well as the goals were clear and well explained. Two students pointed out that the detail and the fashion in which the work was executed helped them in their understanding and several students expressed the schedule (see attachment I-III) to be an asset. Apart from a few details which some students felt to be a bit difficult, the project was overall easy to understand and one S9 student said that it was apparent that “values” was a major topic. If anything was unclear, the students could count on the teacher to help them and one student from S9 added that they enjoyed always getting constructive criticism. Most students answered positively with regard to have gotten continuous support from their teacher. S8 had an average of 8.0, S9 9.3 and A9 showed 7.3.

When asked what they considered to have practiced during our project, specifically with regard to the four language skills, the students had different opinions. S8 had only two students saying that they merely got to practice one skill, whereas the rest were rather evenly distributed saying either two, three or all four language skills. In S9, the smallest group consisting of three students expressed that they got to practice three of the four language skills. The rest of the students in S9 were spread out rather evenly amongst those saying one, two or four skills – the largest group of six students claiming to have practiced only one language skill. However, answers from A9 differ in that no student said that they got to practice only one skill. As a matter of fact, the majority of twelve students expressed that they got to improve and work with all four, the rest evenly divided with naming either two or three.

The majority in this case stated that the text and the work was different as well as more
difficult than what they were used to. This notion was also expressed by some in S8. Most students in all classes agreed that they got to extend their vocabulary as well as improve their writing while incorporating the practice of reflection and formulating their own thoughts. Amongst year nine students, some expressed that they were able to improve one’s own text through evaluating, motivating and summarizing, which was very rewarding. Many also emphasized the role of various writing tasks and discussions to support this as well as help them in their writing, despite it being difficult at times. One student from S9 added that teacher response helped to grasp their own level of writing. Whereas one student from A9 expressed that they got to practice the art of argumentation, another from S9 said that everyone speaking together gave courage to speak themselves. Two students from S9 also stated that particularly the journal writing was a bit stressful - but still fun. Applicable to most students, concerning all classes, was the notion of them to have practiced and worked with new dialects. A few students from year eight also mentioned the audiobook, however, some said it to be helpful while some preferred reading to themselves.

To practice pronunciation and dialects, using *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* as a tool, the students gave a mixed impression. The average amongst all classes range from 6-7, making it a more than ok tool when practicing this.

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<tr>
<td><strong>In what way do you think that The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn worked as a tool for practicing pronunciation and dialects? (This concerns your understanding of different dialects as well as pronunciation of words). Circle your answer.</strong></td>
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<td>Snitt: 6.4</td>
<td>Not well</td>
<td>OK</td>
<td>Very well</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>In what way do you think that The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn worked as a tool for practicing pronunciation and dialects? (This concerns your understanding of different dialects as well as pronunciation of words). Circle your answer.</strong></td>
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<td>Very well</td>
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Eight students from year eight clearly expressed a positive attitude towards learning new dialects and most had no problem understanding, for the reason that they are exposed to various types of language on a daily basis. Three students commented on how many of the words in the novel were new as well as different, whereas one student expressed a desire to have more words included in the wordlist. Amongst year nine students, the notion was that the language in the novel was very different from what they are used to and that to some the dialect was a bit difficult. However, in both classes from year nine, several students expressed the variation in speech and dialect to be a positive thing and that they got a better understanding of the world that the novel aimed to depict. One student said that it worked well as a tool and several agreed that it helped their learning and to increase their understanding.

When asked what type of approaches or methods had been most profitable while working with the novel and its content, the majority of both year eight and nine answered: group work. The reasons for favoring working in groups were that it was easy to share as well as hear different views or opinions. Also, students were able to support each other and groups promoted more efficient work as it allowed for more intense discussions. Several students, mostly those in A9, expressed the notion of speech anxiety to decrease while working in groups, i.e. having to speak in front of fewer people. Some students specified it to concern foreign languages and comments stated that they were less scared of making errors. No student from year eight made any distinct preference to work individually, though one mentioned that it was easier to show one’s own understanding. However, from year nine, several said that individual work made it easier to show their own understanding and that it added more focus on the task at hand. One student from A9 supplemented that working individually gave better response and that it was easier to work based on their own knowledge level, another saying that no time was wasted on helping others.

When instead asked which method or approach the students preferred, the answers showed a difference in that most favored individual work. This notion concerned year eight as
well as nine. The common reason was that they were able to show their own understanding as well as express their own thoughts and opinions better than while working together with others. However, some students still preferred group work, as it was easy to get help as well as new perspectives from others. Several students from A9 also expressed that working in groups helped them gain more courage to speak as well as make errors in front of others. One negative aspect expressed is that it is easy to pass without doing any work. Another student from S8 also pointed out that while working in groups, it is important that the group consists of people with many different opinions for it to be profitable.

According to most students in year eight as well as nine, new words and phrases were the main objects that they had learnt from working with *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. Another was their perception of their reading skills to have improved, as well as practiced the four language skills. Reasons behind this were the continuous journal writing and answering questions which forced the students to reflect on their own thoughts and how these are expressed through their English. One student from S9 added that they learnt how to argue and “take a stand”. Another opinion, also expressed by both year eight and nine, was the part that history had played and how that contributed to their learning. Several students stated that they now have an understanding of what the society in which Huck and Jim lived looked like and some commented on the situation of, as well as the view on slaves. In year nine, some students also spoke about “societal thoughts and opinions from that time” and the treatment of black people throughout history.

5.3.1 Interpreting the results

The questionnaires show that most students found the project to be more interesting or fun than boring. Although, this concerned more students from year nine than year eight. Though the tempo was considered high it was still efficient and challenging. However, our implication is that the high pace prompted more efficient work and challenged the students in a positive way. What we gather from this is that students still wished for more time to write and reflect.

Moreover, the design of our project was much different than what the students are used to. Despite this, as well as the project being perceived as more difficult, many still acknowledged the benefits of reading a book such as *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. Also, the majority expressed that the design (working schedule, constructive criticism, support from the teacher and peer review) helped them in their understanding and learning in various ways. The fact that the younger students (S8) found it more difficult indicates that the
project was either too advanced or that the project needed an adaption, such as more time
given to the younger students. This concerns both the understanding of the book itself as well
as instructions given.

All students did not acknowledge all four language skills when answering the
questionnaire. However, several seemed to acknowledge more skills throughout the rest of the
questionnaire. Most students in all classes agreed that they got to extend their vocabulary as
well as improve their writing while incorporating the practice of reflection and formulating
their own thoughts. This was much thanks to continuous journal writing and answering
questions directly related to specific topics. Though journal writing was considered a bit
stressful, the students still enjoyed it. Our interpretation is that they are not used to express
their own thoughts and opinions to this extent, which made it stressful. However, once they
grasped the aspect of journal writing they enjoyed it. Another perception amongst the students
was that their reading skills had improved. Furthermore, many students expressed that they
had gained more confidence to speak in front of others, thanks to working in smaller groups.

With regard to using the novel as a tool to practice dialects, most students were positive.
Comments stated it to be exiting as well as challenging, while some had no difficulties at all.
It was much due to the various speech and different dialects which made the story appear
more authentic according to our students. The historical perspective became more visible to
the students, several reacting and expressing their sympathies towards the black community as
well as emphasizing the importance of human equality.

All classes thought that the most profitable approach had been group work throughout the
project, but when asked how they prefer to work in general, both S8 and S9 preferred to work
individually. We argue that their answers differ due to the complexity of this project, and
students found comfort in the possibility to rely on others. The students prefer to work
individually when they recognize the work methods and state that this is because they don’t
have to help others and can show their own individual understanding of the task better. A9,
however, were consistent in preferring group work. This could have to do with the large
amount of students having speech anxieties in that class. According to most students in year
eight as well as nine, new words and phrases were the main objects that they had learnt from
working with *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. 
6. Summary and conclusion

Through action research, our goal was to determine in what ways The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn could be used to meet requirements stated in Lgr11. Our aim was to find out how a teaching module on The Adventure of Huckleberry Finn can be designed to encourage critical thinking as well as address racial, societal and prejudice topics in Swedish ESL classrooms. The requirements investigated were that students should “reflect over living conditions, social and cultural phenomena in different contexts and parts of the world where English is used” (Lgr11, p. 32) as well as “understand and interpret the content of spoken English and in different types of texts” (Lgr11, p. 32). Another requirement is that students are to understand and comprehend “literature and other fiction in spoken, dramatized and filmed forms” (Lgr11, p. 34). Furthermore, we looked at how the novel promoted discussions concerning individual freedom, equality and “solidarity with the weak and vulnerable” (Lgr11, p. 9). We also wanted the students to develop and understand these values as well as the present through an historical perspective (Lgr11, p. 11).

Our impression is that the project was overall successful. The students seemed interested, as well as engaged in the novel and the different tasks. Although, some students found it a bit difficult the general impression was that it was not too difficult, but rather challenged the students to the appropriate degree. Even though our three classes differed in many aspects and the project had to be altered differently, all classes still managed to touch upon the above stated requirements. Our main observation was that the project would greatly benefit from more time. Though this action research did not allow it, more time could grant students to further reflect, analyze and discuss the topics which the novel supplies, to a greater degree.

Another conclusion drawn from our action research is that, even though most of the debates and controversy surrounding Twain’s novel has taken place in the US, it is yet apparent in our society. The majority of our students took great offense to the use of the word “negro”, as well as showed great sympathy towards the black community and the slaves. Despite the fact that it is an old book, it is evident that it is a classic which still awakens emotions and discussions connected to today’s society. Many topics are still relevant to this day and the students in our action research acknowledged these. The historical perspective proved to be an asset to the students in their understanding of the
novel. One aspect that facilitated this, was the way in which they could relate to the main character Huckleberry Finn.

The novel, furthermore, worked as a successful tool in practicing and understanding different dialects. According to the students themselves, Twain’s dialectical use further added to the authenticity of the story and made it easier to get an insight into the characters and their perspectives.

To summarize, the design of our project was different from what the students were used to. However, most students expressed this in a positive manner, stating that it was an interesting and fun experience. They also expressed that the design helped them in their understanding of not only the novel but the project in general. Something to consider is that as it is different to the students – again, more time was preferred, but also that constructive criticism and formative assessment is essential (especially when initiating the project) for it to be profitable. We consider the project to have been successful. Even though all students did not fully engage in every task or aspect of the project, our impression is that they all benefitted from it.

Considering the circumstances and the results of our research, a future direction might be to carry this out in a more heterogeneous classroom. A common aspect of all our classes is that they are homogenous and an interesting future development of our study could be to try this in an environment with many different backgrounds. We believe that it would contribute to other interesting discussions as well as parallels to our modern society.
7. References


McCusker, T. (2012, August 22). The Life of Mark Twain [Video file]. Retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kIFx8x4CbC0


8. Attachments

8.1 Student handout I: Lesson plan

Mark Twain

&

The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn


**Week 17**

*Tuesday 22/4: Chapter 1.*

*Homework: until next week is to finish ch.7.*

**Week 18**

*Monday 28/4: Finish ch. 2-7 until tomorrow!*

*Tuesday 29/4: Have ch. 2-7 ready for discussion.*

**Week 19**

*Tuesday 6/5: Finish ch. 11-15 until next week!*

*Homework for Monday 12/5: finish ch.15.*

**Week 20**

*Monday 12/5: Have up until ch. 15 ready for discussion!*

Oral presentation in groups.

*Tuesday 13/5: ch. 16-18.*

Writing assignment finished.
8.2 Student handout II: Journal questions

Huckleberry Finn
By Mark Twain
(Collins English Library)

Journal Questions:

Lesson 2:
- Ch. 1: Why doesn’t Huck’s father want for him to go to school? Why is this a problem for him?
- Ch. 2: How did Huck escape from the cabin and how did he cover up his trace?
- Ch. 3: What was Jim’s reaction when he saw Huck on Jackson Island? Why did he react like that?
- Ch. 4: Who gets blamed for Huck’s fake murder? Why do you think that is? How did the lady that Huck met realize that he was a boy even though he was in ”girls clothes”? What do you think about her theory? Is there any truth to it?

Lesson 3:
- How does Huck and Jim’s language differ from the Duke and the King’s?
- Is it affecting your understanding of the content? How?
- Why do you think Mark Twain chose to write like this?

Lesson 4:
- Which of the two versions we have read do you prefer based on how the language is used?
- Does it affect the meaning of Twain’s story to change the word “negro” to “slave”? Why?/Why not?
Lesson 5:

- Ch. 13. Read the dialogue between Huck and Aunt Sally on p.56-57 about the steamboat accident. What is Aunt Sally’s opinion about it? What is your reaction to her statement?
- In Ch.14 -15, Huck and Tom are about to help Jim escape from the Phelps’ farm. What do you think of Huck and Tom’s behavior and what do you think about the things they ask of Jim?
- In what way do you think Jim is being portrayed in the novel? Try to back up your arguments with similarities and differences to the other characters.
8.3 Student handout III: Wordlist

Huckleberry Finn

Chapter 1:

good manners: bra hyfs
proper behaviour: lämpligt uppförande
maid: hembiträde
torn: slitna/sönder
yard: gårdsplan
“smart tongue”: uppkäftig
down town: stadskärnan, centrum
shore: kust
cabin: stuga
hunted: jagade
fetched: skaffade
handle: handtag på verktyg
nailed: spikad
supper: kvällsmat
chased: jagade

Chapter 2:

tree-branches: trädgrenar
bank: sandbank
corn-meal: majsmjöl
threw: kastade
shallow lake: grundsjö
solid: fast
Chapter 3:
traps: fällor
exploring: utforskade
ought: borde
raft: flotte
cave: grotta
considerable: åtskilligt
tin lamp: lampa av tenn

Chapter 4:
uneasy: obekväm

Chapter 5:
wigwam: indiantält
suppose: anta
foolish: idiotiskt
poor: stackars
dared: vågat
upstream: uppströms

Chapter 6:
fellows: karlar
bald: skallig
ordinary: alldagligt/vanligt
chaps: grabbar
mainly: huvudsakligen
duke: hertig
rightful: rättmätige
suffering: lidande
Chapter 7:
Considerable: väsentlig/betydande
Steamboat: ångbåt
The bend: bukten
Advertisements: reklam
Curtain: gardin/ridå
The grandest: den mest storslagna
Mention: nämna
Tricked: lurad
Newcomers: nykomlingar
Cabbages: kål

Chapter 8:
Shore: kust/strand
Cloth: tyg
Lawyer: advokat
Gathered: samlades

Chapter 9:
Coffin: kista
Godly: gudaktiga
Rubbish: struntprat
Suspicions: misstankar
Sorrows: sorger

Chapter 10:
Coughed: hostade
Bedding: sängkläder
Chapter 11:
Prove: bevisar
Lawful: lagligt

Chapter 12:
Rough: grov
Sharp-looking: intelligent utseende
Inked: skrivet i bläck
Cotton-fields: bomullsfält
Considerable: väsentlig/betydande

Chapter 14:
Chain: kedja
Clue: ledtråd

Chapter 15:
Tools: redskap
Disappointed: besviken
Aching: smärtade
Proper: ordentliga
Tear: riva
Be in charge: bestämma
8.4 Student handout IV: Final assignment

"The secret to getting ahead is getting started"

To finish up our four weeks of working with the novel about Huckleberry Finn you are going to write a short reflective text where you choose, describe and compare yourself to one of the characters that we have gotten to know in the book. You are free to use thoughts, opinions and discussions which we have had together in order to write a fluent and interesting text.

The criteria for this assignment are:
- Write about a character from the book that you are interested in.
- Structure: an introduction, a discussion and an ending.
- Describe the character and compare him or her to yourself
- How are you similar? How are you different?

What to think about
- How well you show your understanding of the novel and the characters.
- How clearly, coherently and fluently you express yourself.
- How varied your language is.
- How carefully you have worked through your text before submitting it.
The use of Huckleberry Finn in the English classroom

1. A) What do you think about our work with the book *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*? *Circle your answer.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Uninteresting</th>
<th>OK</th>
<th>Interesting</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Boring</th>
<th>OK</th>
<th>Fun</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Too fast</th>
<th>OK</th>
<th>Too slow</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

B) Why do you feel this way? Motivate your answer.

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2. A) How do you think the instructions and the goals concerning the tasks have been described and explained? *Circle your answer.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Clear</th>
<th>OK</th>
<th>Unclear</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

B) Why do you feel that way? Motivate your answer.

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3. Do you feel that you have been given enough help and support from the teacher throughout this project? *Circle your answer.*
4. Which one of the four language skills: reading, writing, listening and speaking do you feel that you got to practice during this project? *Mark your answer(s) and motivate how.*

☐ Reading :

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☐ Writing :

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☐ Listening :

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☐ Speaking :

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5. A) In what way do you think that *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* worked as a tool for practicing pronunciation and dialects? (This concerns your understanding of different dialects as well as pronunciation of words). *Circle your answer.*

Not well  OK  Very well
 1  2  3  4  5  6  7  8  9  10

B) Why do you feel this way? Motivate your answer.

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.....................................................................................................................................
6. A) *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* is a novel with several different subjects to discuss. We have worked through some of these subjects in different ways, e.g.: together in class, in smaller groups and individually. Which way/ways did you think worked well and which did not? Why?

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B) In what way do you prefer to work? Why?

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7. What do you consider to have learnt while working with this project?

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8. Is there anything else that you would like to mention or bring to our attention?

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Thank you for your participation!