Authentic texts or adapted texts – That is the question!

The use of authentic and adapted texts in the study of English in two Swedish upper secondary schools and a study of student and teacher attitudes towards these texts.

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Abstract

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*Authentic texts or adapted texts – That is the question! The use of authentic and adapted texts in the study of English in two Swedish upper secondary schools and a study of student and teacher attitudes towards these texts.*

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The aim of this paper is to find out which attitudes teachers and students have towards authentic and adapted texts used in the teaching of English in two Swedish grammar schools. Furthermore, the paper aims to demonstrate the importance of proper text selection in relation to student motivation.

To achieve this, a survey was conducted with second year students in two different schools; on top of this, several interviews were conducted with students as well as an interview with a teacher. This was done to demonstrate the different attitudes towards the textbook and authentic texts and to illustrate the importance of choosing topics that students can relate to.

The results show that students preferred to read authentic texts. These texts provided them with interesting topics. The teacher also preferred to use authentic texts and agreed that authentic texts usually created an active classroom, but pointed out that to substitute the textbook entirely with authentic material was unrealistic. Therefore, a combination of the two types of text would be preferable.

Key words

English, authentic texts, adapted texts, student motivation, simplified material meaning, authentic material meaning, topic selection.

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Appendix
1. Introduction

During our VFT period we came into contact with various English textbooks used in the Swedish school system; books containing texts that quite often were perceived as irrelevant to the students. Many times we experienced that students were not able to relate to the texts and therefore were unenthusiastic in their reading and the following discussions. When we asked the students for their opinion on what they had read, the answer was often that the subject did not interest them and that it had no relevance to them whatsoever.

When reading the two articles Ut med läroboken¹ and In med böckerna i undervisningen², published in Lärarnas tidning, we understood that this was a pressing issue. Jan Nilsson, the writer of Ut med läroboken criticises Mona Hillman Pinheiro, the writer of the latter article, by stating that students’ motivation in reading texts is higher when using authentic texts in the classroom. He further states that students today need situations where they can read, write about and discuss different issues they find important. He continues to argue that the textbook used in class does not provide the student with interesting topics; therefore the textbook should be banished. Hillman Pinheiro on the other hand states that the textbook is useful both to students and teachers. She believes that school material offers structure and guidance to students on how to read and learn. She further believes that through this kind of material the teacher saves some time when preparing the lessons. Hillman Pinheiro states that teachers nowadays have so many things to do and so little time to spare; since all tasks are already prepared the textbook is useful.

We believe in the importance of texts in English studies. Even though this particular debate evolves around the use of textbooks in Swedish we believe, that if there is an ongoing debate as to which texts to use, it is interesting to examine the different attitudes towards the texts used in the classroom.

² Hillman Pinheiro, M. (2005, 10/6-18/8). In med böckerna i undervisningen. Lärarnas tidning, p. 42
In the following, we will use the terms “textbook” and “authentic texts”. When we talk about textbooks we refer to the textbooks used in class – in our cases *Blueprint* and *Short Cuts*. When we talk about authentic text we refer to texts such as news articles, novels and short stories in their original form written for native English speakers. A more detailed description of the terms can be found in the “Theory” section.

1.1 Aim
We want to examine students’ and teachers’ attitudes towards the texts in the books used in class. We want to find out if students and teachers prefer textbooks or authentic material or if both are needed in order to provide the students with the best possible study aids. We want to investigate which criteria go into the process of choosing the texts and to some extent which ways of working with the texts are preferable. By doing this, we aim to find out if it is possible to boost student motivation and thereby heighten their interests in reading and increase their learning abilities.

1.2 Questions
Our basic questions are:

- How do you motivate the students?
- Is there a connection between the choice of texts and student motivation?
- What are teachers’ and students’ attitudes towards textbook texts and authentic material?
- In relation to the question above – which of the above mentioned types of text do teachers and students prefer?
- Is it necessary to combine these two types of material in order to increase students’ motivation in reading or can we succeed in this by using only one?

1.3 Limitations
We decided not to take the students’ cultural background, class or gender into consideration. We do understand that these factors may play an important role when discussing motivation in reading texts but due to lack of time we decided not to include these factors in our paper. Our intention is not to minimize the importance of these factors. We are more interested in general opinions when reading is concerned and unless
the above mentioned qualities turn out to be of great importance they will not be included in our discussion.

2. Theory

2.1 Introduction
We believe that texts play an important role in teaching and acquiring a second language. It is essential that a teacher uses texts that appeal to the students in order to get their attention and to increase motivation. Therefore we think that it is important for the teacher to include the use of authentic texts in the classroom. This extends the students’ possibilities of finding and subsequently reading books that appeal to them. This is supported by theory which underlines the importance of relevant texts and motivated students in the learning process.

2.2 Course plans
It might be interesting to see if the official documents help us decide what sort of texts to choose. It could be that the aims of the course plans do not require the use of authentic texts in the classroom or that they encourage it.

One of the aims in the teaching of English is, besides the communicative aspect, to broaden the students’ knowledge of the English speaking world – that is the cultural aspect. In most textbooks you find sections about parts of the English speaking world e.g. India, Australia and the U.S. What is interesting is the way the cultural aspect is presented. Even though the textbook is a few years old, the topic could very well still be of relevance to the students. But often fabricated texts are used – e.g. travel stories or visits by families to foreign countries, and these have a tendency to feel “forced” and irrelevant.

Furthermore, many textbooks use adapted texts where cultural elements are removed since these are often considered to be difficult parts of a text. Hereby one of the aims of the course plans is compromised namely that a student should be familiar with English
spoken in different parts of the world; this could include varieties such as Cockney and Pidgin English.

Another aim to strive for is to make sure that the student is motivated beyond the actual learning situation. This puts a great deal of pressure on the teacher to find texts and plan the lessons so that the students maintain their interest in the language even outside the classroom. Lundahl discusses the various motivating factors and reaches the conclusion that authentic texts often motivate the students more.

In the course plan it is not specified if one should or should not use authentic texts; nor is it specified if the teacher should use adapted texts. It states that students should be able to read prose, factual prose and factual texts but not whether or not these should be adapted to the students’ level by using a textbook or if the teacher should find “real life examples”. The teacher should make use of the fact that students are exposed to the language everyday in different ways – that is, include the different elements of English that students come into contact with in their spare time in a classroom situation. But it is not specified how this should be done.

It seems that a great deal of freedom is given to the teacher; but with freedom follows responsibility. The teacher is to make sure that the aims of the course plan are achieved, but whether this is done by using of the textbook, novels, adapted texts or the text in its original form is up to each teacher to decide.3

2.3 Theoretical grounds
Bo Lundahl, teacher of English didactics at Malmö University, argues in *Läsa på främmande språk*, that English studies in Swedish schools must take into account the current lifestyle that most teenagers have adopted. One should also take into account the new knowledge they have acquired and consequently introduce more suitable and interesting texts for students to read; texts that reflect a student’s background, experience

and knowledge; texts which may be found in youth magazines, life-style magazines and newspapers. Also, teaching English texts today should not focus mainly on formal structures and lexical items. Instead, it should focus on meaning and content and the students should be able to draw their own conclusions about what they have read and comment on it.4

2.3.1 Authentic texts and adapted textbook texts
Lundahl states that authentic texts should be introduced in the classroom. “Authentic material” refers to e.g. books and articles where language and structure are not simplified in any way. According to The Oxford Dictionary of English, the term “authentic” has at least one meaning: “of undisputed source or origin and not a copy; genuine”.5 For teaching purposes this refers to English books, novels or articles that have been written by an English speaking author to a native audience or speaker; in these cases the language used has not been altered.

The term “authentic” has been used as a reaction against fabricated artificial language, which is mostly used in instructional dialogues6 and textbooks taught in class. This term refers to a usage of language in a non-pedagogical way, which occurs naturally in society and reflects the culture of the target language. For instance, slang and idioms, which are rarely used in textbooks, could appear in authentic material.7 It should be made clear that authentic texts may be included in textbooks, but often the texts included will be subject to a certain level of adaptation. In the textbooks, the texts are often supplied with vocabulary lists, explanatory comments as well as with fixed questions. The original text can be changed formally and linguistically to suit the textbook needs.

It should be underlined, that what is advocated here is not a total rejection of the textbook in the teaching of English in Swedish schools, but rather that authentic texts should be introduced in the classroom as additional material; authentic texts can provide the

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4 Lundahl, B. (1998) ”Läs på främmande språk” p. 11
6 What is meant by “instructional dialogues” is that the language is fixed to serve an educational purpose e.g. to highlight grammatical problems or lexical expressions.
7 Kramsch, C. (1993) ”Context and culture in language teaching” p. 177
students with original language. Moreover, it could be argued that authentic material increases student motivation when reading in English. If the students are exposed to English in its true form, that is that the language is not simplified, they are able to deduct important cultural and lexical information.

The choice of the text is highly important. Authentic texts focus mainly on contents and meaning and not on linguistic forms or other structures. Authentic material can present the reader with cultural messages as well as prepare students for a so called “pleasure reading”. Generally, authentic materials do not entirely replace the textbooks but they can be used as a substitution for certain texts that might not be well-suited for classroom use.8 Many teachers nowadays have realised that authentic texts have a motivating effect on students. For example, a newspaper article or an interview can be perceived as more vivid or “real” than the texts you might find in textbooks. It’s through these kinds of authentic texts that students and teachers are able to approach the target country’s culture and the people living there; we are able to compare our own culture and lifestyle with that of a particular country. Authentic texts do not have to be full-length books. They could also include material such as factual texts, ads, warning signs, menus, pricelists etc. The list is long and there are many ways to include these texts in the teaching of English.9

2.3.2 How is meaning acquired in authentic texts and textbook texts?
Kramsch believes that meaning is not acquired from the spoken or written language but from the dialogue which is being created between the reader and the text. It’s a “central code” which is defined as a system of ideas and customs that are involved in a certain culture’s meaning; a meaning which a learner should be prepared to encounter.10 Linguists have tried to explore the reading process by presenting various models. For a long time it was believed that there were two kinds of reading, namely the bottom up and the top down model. Lundahl tries to explain the relationship between a reader and the text by referring to these two models.11 The bottom up model refers to the decoding of the language used in the text. That is, the reader is constantly trying to translate different

8 Swaffar, Arens & Byrnes (1991) ”Reading for meaning” p. 190
9 Levihn, Eyre, Forsgren, Fox & Norman, (1991) ”Språkpedagogik” p. 31
10 Kramsch (1993) p. 177
words or in some cases identify different sounds which he or she combines into words and later on sentences. In the top down model the reader draws on his or her own experiences and background and this in turn might help them to draw their own conclusions about what is said in the text. The top down model lets the reader take control of the text and creates the meaning the reader wants to establish.12

The problem addressed here is the way this “meaning” is presented in the classroom. The bottom up model has influenced the reading criteria for many years. Texts for second language learners have been simplified in order to suit their needs and ease comprehension. Most of the time the simplified text is written in the present form with a vocabulary of approximately 300 words and short sentences with no more than six or seven words. Usually the story deals with a familiar situation where two people talk and a large part of the text is basically in a dialogue form. Simplification of the language used in the classroom is deliberately made by the teacher to perform certain pedagogical tasks and at the same time ease communication. In other words, the teacher presents texts in a simplified language to students so they can understand what they read.13

There is a discrepancy in the way language is learned in schools. If there is a tendency to familiarise students with the culture of the target language is it a possibility to do so by using textbooks where language is adapted? Shouldn’t students be exposed to a natural use of the language?

2.3.3 Simplified material meaning and authentic material meaning
The writers of “Reading for meaning” state that as teachers we might have done the students a disservice by teaching simplified texts instead of authentic material. Simplification usually alters the original text. This, in some cases, hinders the learners’ comprehension, both culturally and lexically. “Difficult” words can be replaced by easier words; hence the students will not get the chance to learn certain English idioms or

12 Ibid p. 97
13 Alderson & Urquhart (1984) "Reading in a foreign language” p. 182
phrases. The replacement of synonyms and other linguistic items may also affect the learner’s ability to adopt new words.\textsuperscript{14}

One might argue that the main point is not to ignore traditional readability but to expand it. Language difficulty should be dealt with in terms of content, context and intent. One way of looking for these features is through markers of cohesion, such as adverbs and conjunctions that refer to forthcoming information. In simplified texts these markers are often deleted.

Readability levels do make a difference in terms of comprehension. Students who read a simplified version tend to be more productive simply because they understand it. But at the same time, the language they are presented with lacks e.g. synonymy, transitional verbs and subordinate clauses etc. since this have been erased from the original longer version of the text. The danger of this is that the student might lose track of what the story is really all about.\textsuperscript{15}

By contrast, authentic texts provide the student with real life materials which is non-sequentially organised and encourages relational thinking when dealing with the text. Moreover, textbooks usually tell you what is right and wrong with a sentence grammatically or when vocabulary is concerned. But a student should be able to put this knowledge into a wider context; for example when he or she is given sentences that occur in different context but have or have not the same meaning. Furthermore, students normally let the teachers decide what they have to read when the textbook is concerned, whereas authentic material requires the student to investigate various levels of comprehension and at the same time be aware of their own knowledge discrepancies and qualities.\textsuperscript{16}

Authentic texts can be better at involving the reader in the process of reading since they have a “real” message and at the same time can be perceived as more genuine. The

\textsuperscript{14} Arens, Byrnes & Swaffar (1991) p. 58
\textsuperscript{15} Alderson & Urquhart (1984) p. 190
\textsuperscript{16} Kramsch (1993) p. 200
cultural dimensions are more vivid since slang and everyday language are often used. The language can be perceived as more alive and not written with a specific aim (e.g. grammatical purpose) so that the actual plot falls into the background. In contrast, the authentic texts often have the plot as the essential element and this in turn makes it easier to capture the students’ attention.\textsuperscript{17}

2.3.4 Theories against and in favour of authentic texts
There have been different opinions concerning the use of authentic texts in the classroom. Krashen believes that a text should only be slightly over a student’s comprehension capability and is against the use of authentic material. Malmberg states that authentic material is only suitable for students in upper secondary school. Only then are students able to read and understand literature and factual texts. On the same line, Hellström declares that students are not able to read material written by native speakers in the same way as native speakers do. He believes that students who learn a foreign language do not possess sufficient knowledge to read authentic material and therefore texts should be adjusted to their linguistic level.

By contrast Neuner states that when choosing a text, the linguistic level should not be the primary concern. The teacher should also take into account a student’s perception of the real world and all the information the student is presented with. Neuner talks about textual comprehension and puts forth the example that a student may guess the meaning or a message of the text by simply referring to the pictures or titles used in the text. Through personal and cultural experiences a student is able to draw relevant conclusions. Tornberg and Sörensen expand this theory by stating that already from early stages students are able to understand more complex structures of a foreign language than they are able to produce; students should simply get used to these kinds of texts. In the beginning, they might not understand all the information given to them; many words might be unfamiliar to them but they can guess the meaning of difficult words and draw their conclusions about the meaning and content of a text.\textsuperscript{18}

\textsuperscript{17} Lundahl (1998) p. 61
\textsuperscript{18} Levihn, Eyre, Forsgren, Fox & Norman (1991) p. 32
2.3.5 The importance of motivation
Why spend time on finding out which texts to use in the classroom? Why not present your students with a text that you find suitable and make them read it with the intention of discussing it afterwards? Certain writers claim that there is a difference between reading a text and being engaged in the reading of a text. It is claimed that if a student is motivated in the reading of a text, the student is a better learner. Furthermore, a motivated reader will …”activate prior knowledge to construct new understandings…”19. It is also claimed that the development of literacy (obtained from reading texts) and motivated students is “a reciprocal relationship…”20; the better you get at understanding the texts you read, the more motivated you will become. This will encourage you to engage in the reading of more texts with an increasing difficulty level. Reading leads to a better textual understanding which in turn inspires you to read further. So the trick should be to get the students interested in texts – to get them motivated in the process of working with texts within and outside the classroom.

2.3.6 Different factors that further motivation
If you accept that motivated students are better learners, you are faced with another problem, namely how to motivate your students when reading a text. It is important to find out which factors influence the students in order to be able to change/enhance them. In short, in order to increase the students’ motivation, you should find out how to capture and maintain the students’ interest when introducing the text, while reading the text and during work on the text.

Verhoven and Snow have several suggestions how as to make sure that the students are motivated. They believe that if you allow students to take part in the choosing of the text, they will automatically be more interested in reading and working with it.21 At the same time, letting students take some responsibility helps them to reflect on their own learning process. It encourages them to think about what they actually want to learn about and how they want to do this. If you helped plan your learning process you are likely to be more motivated in the classroom and thereby create a better learning and class

19 Verhoeven & Snow (2001) ”Literacy and Motivation” p. 5
20 Ibid p. 5
21 Verhoven & Snow (2001) pp. 168
environment. By doing this you teach them how to learn and this will help the students in their studies further on.

The textbook and the worksheets which often follow it might be perfectly all right, but perhaps motivation could be increased if the students themselves come with ideas on how to work with a text. This should of course be done with the teacher acting as a guiding force. The teacher should present various ways of working with a text to the students, listen to their suggestions and perhaps create a combined list of activities. Furthermore, the method should be adapted to fit the needs of the different classes. What is perfect for one class will not necessarily work in another.

It can be difficult for a teacher to motivate the students when reading texts – especially novels or other longer texts since these have a reputation of being boring and irrelevant. In competition with e.g. television, radio and comics which supply the student with a variety of short-term entertainment, not just any text will do. The theme of a text is extremely important. The theme should be of interest and of relevance to the students – otherwise the teacher will have a hard time maintaining class motivation. Students will often find a text interesting “…if it is familiar and easy to comprehend”. If the theme is familiar to the student, it will also be easier to discuss in class. At the same time it enables the student to activate his or her cultural background and the knowledge that he or she already possesses.

When it comes to the language of the text it becomes increasingly difficult for the teacher to make the right choices. Should a teacher choose a text which is by far too easy for the group, the students are not likely to stay motivated. The text will be seen a dull and lacking purpose. On the other hand, should the teacher choose a text which is too difficult for the students they might shut down all together and read the text without even trying to understand it. Furthermore, the teacher has to consider the purpose of the text; e.g. should

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23 Ibid p. 8
24 Ibid pp. 14
26 Verhoven & Snow (2001) p. 170
a text be included, even though it might be too difficult for students, because of the
famous writer? Or would it be better to exclude the famous writer (thereby missing out
on a highly motivating factor) and choose a text which is more accessible to the students?
As we mentioned earlier, Kramsch, inspired by Krashen, puts forth a theory saying that a
text should always be just above a student’s level of proficiency. This way the student is
challenged but will not find the text impossible to understand and at the same time the
student will achieve satisfaction when the text is understood.27 You might say that the
language of a text should be accessible while at the same time challenging and
stimulating for the reader – adding new words to the reader’s vocabulary.28

3. Methods and data

To investigate whether or not our assumptions concerning authentic material was correct
we decided to apply a quantitative approach and to use a qualitative way of dealing with
the results. By this we mean that we analyzed the results we collected instead of simply
presenting them.29 We decided on two different means of finding the answers to our
questions. The first was a questionnaire which we handed out to two classes in two
different schools. The purpose of using questionnaires as a method was to find out
general opinions or certain knowledge within the respondent group.30

3.1 Presentation of textbooks

We were aware of the fact that the different classes used different textbooks, namely
Blueprint B and Short Cuts. Therefore we had to decide whether or not these should be
treated separately or could be seen as more or less the same. Both textbooks are used in
English B course and both contain classic writers such as Shakespeare, Jane Austen,
Charles Dickens and Daniel Defoe. The topics of the books are by and large the same
including topics like love, the classics, suspense and media. Even though the specific
texts chosen may vary the general build of the books is the same. Both books contain

27 Collie & Slater “Literature in the Language Classroom” (1987) p. 5
29 Andersen, H. (1994) ”Vetenskapsteori och metodlära” pp. 70
30 Ejvergård, R. (2002) ”Vetenskaplig metod för projektarbete” p. 44
questions to work with after the texts, and the questions cover areas like grammar, translation, word meaning and different writing exercises. Furthermore, both books are equipped with sections in the end of the books where the students can practice their skills in speaking and writing or work with the literature found in the books. Therefore, we decided to treat the textbooks as the same type of teaching material.

3.2 Questionnaire
We handed the questionnaire to 43 students in upper secondary school, second year. As it turned out, no students in the two classes were absent and thereby the level of participation was 100%. The questionnaire was divided into three sections; “texts”, “learning situations” and “work with the text”. In the first section we wanted to find out about the topics that students preferred reading about and if they believed that these were reflected in their textbook. In the second section we were interested in finding out how the topic influenced the students in an actual learning situation and in the third section we hoped to see to what extent students participated in the selection of texts and which factors influenced them in the selection process. We asked the students their opinions on and attitudes towards these texts. Furthermore, we asked them questions relating to the theories concerning authentic and adapted texts. The survey was done in English and the results were analyzed. The students we chose were level B students and doing their second year in upper secondary school; both classes attended Samhällsprogrammet (social sciences).

3.3 Interviews
The second method was to conduct several interviews involving one English teacher and four students; all interviews were taped. The purpose of the student interview was to get a student perspective on the material taught in class. The students were all asked the same questions, but were at the same time allowed to talk freely. These interviews were conducted in Swedish since we were interested in the students’ thoughts and opinions, not their language skills.31

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In order to contrast the student interviews and the questionnaires we decided to conduct an interview with a teacher as well. We wanted to get a teacher’s point of view on the use of authentic texts and textbooks. We asked him questions similar to the questions we asked to the students but with a slightly different approach. We asked the teacher questions about the reasons for his choice of texts; whether or not he used the texts available in the textbooks; his thoughts on choosing between texts; his general opinion on authentic texts etc. We also wanted see which factors influence a teacher’s choice of a text and if the teacher’s considerations matched the students’ wishes. Furthermore, we were interested in seeing to what degree the teacher used authentic texts in the classroom and what pros and cons the teacher had experienced with the different types of text. We decided to perform the interview in Swedish with the same motivation as with the student interviews.

We knew that we could not hope to achieve results which may be applied to the teaching and the learning of English in general. This, however, was not our intention. We aimed to find out how the average student respond to the texts used in the classroom; to see if and why the teacher we interviewed made use of adapted and authentic texts.\textsuperscript{32} Since no students were absent when we conducted the interviews it was possible to make rather precise assumptions concerning these particular two classes. But it should be underlined that we were interested in attitudes, opinions and perhaps discovering certain trends - not truths.

4. Results of questionnaires and interviews

4.1 Results of questionnaires\textsuperscript{33}

When the students were asked to give their opinion on the importance of reading texts in the classroom, 27 students (63\%) answered that it was important to read texts while learning English. This in itself is not surprising. What might be of interest is that 10 students (23\%) found the use of texts of little or no relevance at all. Of these, we know of

\textsuperscript{32} Hartman, J. (1998) ”Vetenskapligt tänkande – Från kunskapsteori till metodteori” pp. 198-203
\textsuperscript{33} The questionnaire and the results of it can be found in the appendix.
at least two dyslexics in the group and we can assume that these are a part of the latter group. Moreover, through a survey conducted earlier, we have established that the students at one of the schools favour the communicative approach to learning English. Since the question was “do you think it is important to read texts when you learn English?” some students may not have taken the communicative aspect of text-reading into consideration. However, 10 students showed a negative attitude towards the reading of text and this should be taken into consideration as this could have a serious effect on student motivation

**Chart 1**  Do you think it is important to read texts when you learn English? Grade your answer

![Chart 1](image)

**Student topic preferences**

We also asked the students which kind of texts they prefer and what they, if given the choice, would like to read about. It was very clear that the students preferred novels, short
stories and newspaper articles. When we compared this to the topics the students preferred we saw a high coherence. 22 students (51%) preferred to read about current events in the world. Other topics high on the students’ list were music, English speaking cultures and history. It is interesting to see how these topics correspond with the fact that students favoured newspaper and magazine articles as well as the more classic novel. Typical novel and short story topics are music, movies, history and sports – topics that were also high on the students’ list. The results were not too surprising since both classes have chosen humanities as their main study focus which means that their natural interest lay in the study of language, culture and history.

![Chart 2: What would you like to read about? List four topics.](image)

**Student study preferences**

Since we were interested in the students’ attitudes towards their textbook and authentic texts, we asked them which they preferred. The result was that 34 (80%) choose authentic
texts instead of the textbook. But since 39 of the students (90%) answered that these authentic texts never, rarely or sometimes appeared in the textbook, this is not a surprising result. Since the textbook does not contain the topics the students would like to work with, they naturally choose other options – here authentic texts.

![Chart 3](chart3.png)

When the students were asked to state their opinions on the textbook, frequently used words were “boring”, “lack of meaning”, and “too easy”. Since the students do not think that the topics they want to discuss are in their textbook and they prefer novels and
newspaper articles it is not surprising that they are not positive when describing their textbook. As a result only 14 students of the 43 (32%) have been inspired to follow up on what they have learned in class. Most of these liked the writer and wanted to read more; the others had read an extract and wanted to read the rest.

*Student attitudes towards the questions in textbooks*

When we asked the students about the questions following the text, the same attitude showed itself. Most of the students answered that they did in fact work with the questions following the text, but at the same time they did not find these very relevant. 25 of the students (58%) found that the questions were of minor relevance to the text and only 1 found the questions very relevant.

*Student democracy*

We wanted to find out the students’ attitudes towards how texts are chosen and how the different factors concerning the texts, e.g. the author and the length influence them. 29 of the students (67%) answered that their teacher decides what they are to read; 10 students (23%) answered that they are presented with different texts and then allowed to choose. What is interesting is that when we asked the students which method they preferred 31 (72%) preferred the latter alternative. It is not surprising that most of the students chose the alternative where they are presented with options; when you are given a choice it is easier to find something that appeals to you and at the same time you take an active part in your own learning. What is surprising is that most of the students are not presented with this possibility.
Chart 4  How do you normally decide which texts to use in class?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Options</th>
<th>Number of students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A: You choose a theme and then your teacher finds a text that suits that theme.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B: You are presented with several different texts and themes and choose from these.</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C: Your teacher decides what you are to read.</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D: Other</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When the students are in fact able to choose between texts, we found that the topic is of the utmost importance for the students. 33 students (75%) answered that the topic is very important for the choice of text. Other important factors are the genre (25 students) and language (24 students). On the other hand, the length and the author matter to some extend to the students while the year of publication does not matter at all.
Chart 5

To what degree is the following important to you when you choose a text? Grade your answer

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>Number of students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The length of a text</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The author</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The topic</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Language</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The genre</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The year it was published</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Very Important | Important | Pretty Important | Not that important | Not important at all

How to work with the texts

Since we suspected that the topic might play an important role when it comes to texts read in the classroom we decided to include questions about how the topic influenced the students in different work situations. We asked them to what extent they were influenced by the choice of topic in pair/group and whole class discussions and writing about the topic. The overall impression was that the students were not especially concerned about the topic in any of the mentioned situations – except when it comes to writing about the text; here students were divided between being very much influenced and not being influenced at all. Furthermore, in the cases where the students seemed to be influenced it depended mainly on the pair/group/class in which they were placed. The topic in itself was not to be avoided but rather the specific combination of co-workers. Writing is especially interesting since this turned out to be the working method the students
preferred. It is possible that students feel more comfortable with working with a text when they have time and perhaps dictionaries to help them. It provides them with a certain sense of security and control which is often lost in a classroom situation. On top of this, it enables everybody to take part in a discussion. Even the students who might need some extra time to think a statement through are able to participate.

When the students were asked how they would prefer to work with a text, writing also played an important part. 22 of the students (51%) would like write a summary and 19 (44%) saw writing an essay as a good option. At the same time 19 students (44%) wanted to identify the themes and discuss them. It might come as a small surprise that most of the students, namely 28 (65%), would like to translate words found in the text by using a dictionary. The reason for choosing this otherwise quite monotonous exercise could be that it is at the same time a fairly easy and secure task.

Chart 6 How would you like/prefer to work with a text? You may put more than one X.
4.2 Results of the student interviews

To get the interview started we asked the students’ which topics they wanted to read about in their English studies. All students agreed that articles about current events such as terrorism were more interesting than e.g. texts about the Berlin wall; the students wanted to read about things that they could relate to. They did not find these themes in their textbook but were given articles from e.g. the internet and different English newspapers by their teacher. The students preferred the authentic texts because they seemed more real to them. The texts contained modern expressions, slang and different dialects such as Cockney; they commented that it seemed like the kind of texts that you might read in England “with your morning tea”.\textsuperscript{34} Furthermore, they were enthusiastic about novels. According to the students, the novels presented them with a good story as well as challenging language; this made them focus mainly on the content rather than on the formal structure. They did not feel the need to look up every single word they did not understand – they were able to deduct the meaning of words through contents.

The views on their textbook were mixed. Although they clearly preferred authentic texts, they maintained a positive attitude towards the texts in their textbook. Some of the students stated that if you are able to see the purpose of the text or exercise, the text itself became interesting. It depended very much on how the teacher presented and worked with the text. According to one of the students the textbook presented valuable strategies about how to read a text; at the same time they admitted that grammar is an important factor when you learn the English language and that the textbook can be a good guide. This was not a view shared by all the students. One of the students thought, that she often found the texts from the textbook meaningless because she felt that she wasn’t challenged. If she felt a text was tedious she lost the will to learn and more often than not, she just read the text without actually taking it in.

When it came to working with the texts, the students were again a bit divided. Two of the students thought that the questions following the texts were satisfying. They said that the questions might not be the most inspiring, but they saw the purpose of the assignments.

\textsuperscript{34} Taken from the student interviews
To them, it made sense to read a text, adapted or authentic, which might not be a “perfect” text but where you could see the purpose. The other two were less forgiving. They argued that how the teacher dealt with the text was extremely important. If the questions following a text were too specific or “no-brainers” they did not feel any motivation and only completed the tasks out of duty – not out of interest. According to them, you should be able to see the red thread when working with the text.

The students all concurred that they were better learners if they were motivated. However, they had different views on what was needed to motivate them. For two of them, it was sufficient motivation if they understood the purpose of the text or exercise; they could overcome a boring text or a text directed at a more specific audience. They saw a higher goal, namely to improve their English. The other two stated that “boring” books could become interesting if they were dealt with correctly; that is not to cling to “irrelevant” details, but to have more open and general topic discussions. Via the open questions they were able to see the book in a different light and to bring forth the positive aspects. What they could all agree on was that a very high motivating factor was their grade.

4.3 Results of the teacher interview
When the teacher was asked if he used the textbook a lot in his teaching, he answered rarely. During this semester he had only used texts from the book two or three times. The reason for this, he explained, was that the texts seemed “fixed” to him and he knows from experience that articles and novels are more appreciated by the students he teaches. He made it clear that he found nothing wrong in using the textbook; he just preferred using other texts and activities. His explanation for this was that students have a tendency to find the textbook boring and dreary and even though the text is graded according to level of difficulty, students need challenges that authentic texts provide them with; they feel that they are reading “the real thing”. He underlined that this factor was more evident if you were teaching a class where the linguistic level is higher.

35 Taken from the teacher interview
This was closely linked to his choice of topic. He experienced that if students found that they could relate to the topic their motivation increased. This was easier to achieve with authentic material; he gave examples such as the government and the tsunami or gang violence in Malmö. This really encouraged students to participate – especially if the topic corresponds with their choice of school program. If the topic centres on students’ everyday environment it is easier to embrace it.

Another type of text that students found easy to embrace was music lyrics. For many teenagers music plays a very important role and as a teacher you can find an abundance of topics in the song texts. However, there are certain obstacles when using these kinds of texts; e.g. most of them are protected by copyright laws and therefore the teacher has to be selective and careful when using this material in the classroom.

When we asked the teacher whether or not it was possible to exclude the textbook altogether and only use authentic material, his answer was quite clear. He argued that it was definitely possible, but not preferable. He saw advantages and disadvantages with both types of text. In regard to the texts from the textbook, he saw them as “labour saving”. If a teacher is short of time it is easier to present the class with a text from the textbook; here everything is already taken care of. Furthermore, the teacher can choose a small part of a section and pick out what he or she finds most important; you do not have to teach the whole book. The textbook could also prove valuable when it comes to text comprehension and even though the questions could be perceived as “tedious” and one-sided it is a skill students should master.

When authentic texts were concerned, he pointed out that even though students are often very positive towards these, preparing these texts for teaching is very time-consuming. In addition to this, more often than not the texts can not be used more than once, since the main point of them is their up to date perspective. Moreover, when choosing an authentic text you have to take the linguistic level into consideration. The teacher needs to decide what the appropriate level for the class is. He mentioned that he tried to use Jane
Austen’s *Pride and prejudice* and that it turned out to be far too difficult for the students. Here the authentic text missed its purpose.

5. Discussion of the questionnaires and interviews results

When we discussed theories concerning the importance of motivation we mentioned that one motivational factor was that students should read texts that they find relevant. They should deal with topics they find interesting and familiar. If we accept this statement it is very interesting to see that almost all of the students rarely found their favourite topics in the textbook. This is a serious flaw, but, at the same time, also a flaw which is almost impossible to remedy. When we asked the students what they would like to read about, they preferred topics like current events and social issues that they could relate to. The student interviews confirmed this. If a textbook is supposed to supply this kind of topics it would require a new textbook every month.

Therefore, it is not surprising that we saw a very positive attitude towards the use of authentic texts in the questionnaire and in the interviews with the students; most students would rather read authentic texts than the textbook. This coincides with what the teacher told us when he was asked the question of what generated the “best” response from students; he found them more interested and active when they dealt with texts that they could relate to. But he was also realistic in his response and made it clear that as a teacher you do not always have the time to prepare suitable authentic texts. Sometimes you need to use the textbook, and as he pointed out, it is not a bad thing. The textbook certainly has its uses. It should be made clear that the students, especially in the interviews, stated that the textbook was not all bad and that they saw the purpose of the book; but at the same time, they underlined that they preferred authentic texts.

*Problems with authentic texts*

One problem with the use of authentic texts, which the teacher pointed out, is that they are not graded and sometimes can be too difficult for the students. On the other hand they should not be too easy either. Collie and Slater argue that the teacher has to be aware of
the linguistic level of both text and class. Collie and Slater only highlight the problem but do not present a solution—except that the teacher should take the choice of texts extremely seriously. By contrast, Krashen offers actual guidelines and states that a text should always be just above a student’s comprehension capability. This is obviously something a teacher should strive for, but at the same time, it is almost impossible for the teacher to manage. There might be 26 different levels of comprehension in the same classroom and, as the teacher we interviewed correctly stated, preparing authentic texts is a very time-consuming effort.

Language
One thing the interviews revealed was that the language of the texts was very important to the students; this was also shown in the questionnaire. In the interviews, the students made it very clear that they wanted to read “real” English language; they wanted to read texts where slang, idioms, and dialects were present. In the textbook language is often simplified in order to make it more accessible to students. This not only presents a danger of making the text inconsistent but it also excludes valuable cultural and lexical items; items which the students themselves found useful to learn. According to Swaffar, Arens and Byrnes, slang, idioms, and technical terms are useful in understanding the target culture of the target language and by excluding these the students misses this opportunity. Furthermore, the adapted language found in textbooks hinders the learner in his or her acquisition of new words since the exclusion of difficult words may limit a learner’s vocabulary. Another disadvantage with adapted language you find in textbooks, as Alderson and Urquhart point out, is that the reader may miss out on the actual plot of a story since key phrases and events may have been left out from the original story. In the interviews the students pointed out that it was extremely important that they were presented with a text that made sense. If presented with a story, they preferred the original version and they wanted to deal with the plot of the story—not with specific details. They would rather read a text which might be a little above their comprehension level instead of reading an adapted version.
Reading and understanding texts

When it comes to ways of reading a text and making sense of it Lundahl presents the bottom-up and the top-down models; both models were discussed above. The teacher interviewed preferred the latter model claiming that it was more stimulating for students as well as for the teachers. On the other hand, he admitted that sometimes he used the bottom-up model simply because he found reading and basic text comprehension exercises a valuable method. As far as the students were concerned, they were divided as well. In the interviews all of the students favoured the top-down model even though some saw the purpose of the bottom-up method; they stated that dealing with a text should evolve around discussion about the content and not about specific details. They believed that they were better learners if they could draw their own conclusions when dealing with the text. In the questionnaire, however, the students were split between the two; they wanted both to find the themes of the text and discuss them in class but at the same time most answered that they were interested in translating words from the text and explaining them in English.

Selection of texts

If students are to choose between authentic texts and the textbook, they must be taken into the decision making process. In addition to the choice of which types of texts to use, there is also the matter of how to decide what to read. It was important to find out if the students were allowed to choose for themselves or if the teacher decided which texts to be used. When discussing the theories we mentioned that Verhoven and Snow considered student choice to be an important motivational factor. They emphasized that it is important for the students to be part of the selection of texts since this provides them with some sense of responsibility and this enables them to learn more actively. In the questionnaire however, we discovered that most of the times, the teacher simply decides what is to be read. When we asked the students what they preferred the answer was clear; they wanted to take part in the selection of texts. However, this might not always be a realistic possibility. First of all it can complicate the teaching if too many different texts are used at the same time. It is a very time-consuming process to choose these and it is very hard for the teacher to be updated with all the texts. Also, due to his or her training
the teacher is better suited than the students to make an appropriate choice concerning which texts to use. This does not mean that the teacher should not pay attention to what the students suggest but use the student suggestions in the planning of the lesson. Furthermore, as the teacher states in the interview, there might also be practical limitations. In his case the language department has a limited numbers of texts in sufficient copies for the whole class; and more often that not these books are classics and have been used over and over again. In the interviews, one of the students described the books as being old and worn, filled with scribbling and in general boring to look at; not exactly raising motivation. Even though there are plenty of reasons for letting the students take part in the decision-making, it is clear that there are many restrictions, both practical and theoretical.

6. Conclusion

When we read the articles that were mentioned in the introduction to this paper we understood that the use of texts in the classroom was a much debated issue. How to make language-teaching more relevant to students was and still is constantly discussed by teachers and scholars. What stands out when reading the articles is that none of the writers seems to have considered what the students might think. Both writers argued their views on authentic material and textbooks used in class. But the students were not part of that discussion. At the same time, both writers argue for the use of one material and the exclusion of the other. According to them, there is no middle road.

The questionnaires and interviews we conducted with students showed that they were very interested in taking part in the selection of texts. The text was important in keeping them motivated for further reading and class discussions. Authentic texts proved to be more appreciated by the students because language seemed to be more “real” English; they were able to relate to the texts. At the same time they believed that it was through these kinds of texts they would be able to read about topics they were interested in. However, they did not dismiss the textbook altogether and wanted to it – especially as a
They saw the usefulness of the textbook when dealing with grammar and the structure of language.

The teacher had a similar view when textbooks and authentic material were concerned. He also believed that through authentic material students could read about topics they could relate to, but at the same time he used the textbook in his teaching. Even though he had to find additional material, the textbook saved him time since he did not have to prepare everything himself. It is important to point out, that he did not see the use of the textbook as a compromise in his teaching; he believed that the questions and grammatical problems presented in the books were perfectly fine and it saved him from having to invent the wheel before every lesson. But when texts were concerned he usually went elsewhere.

In our work with questions surrounding the use of authentic texts and the textbook we have discovered that we cannot find a one-side solution. Based on the interviews and the questionnaires we have discovered that students and teachers appreciate the textbook, but at the same time need authentic texts as additional material.

We agree with Lundahl when he states that students are better learners if they are motivated and take part in the learning process. Furthermore, we accept that one motivating factor for students is the topic; reading about things that interest you will heighten your learning ability and increase class participation. What we found when examining the questionnaires and when checking the textbooks was that the topics the students want to read about and the topics found in the textbooks did not correspond. However, the topics can be incorporated by using authentic texts such as novels and newspapers. What is important to remember is that there are more motivating factors than the topic. A teacher might very well be able to motivate the class by using only the textbook – it depends on the class and the teacher. What we did find out is that both teachers and students appreciate authentic material and we think that the goals stated in the curriculum can best be achieved by using both textbook texts and authentic texts.
Both types have advantages and both have shortcomings so to us, a combination is preferable.
Literature


