

Aino Mäkikalli

## **Theoretical underpinnings of teaching literature: the resilience of New Criticism**

What kind of theory or approaches to literature is the teaching of literature in contemporary school based on?

In this presentation, I take into account the historical perspective of the relation between literary theory and teaching of literature, and consider how this relationship appears in the present situation in the context of Finnish Upper Secondary literary education. I will focus on how some of the main ideas of New Criticism have lived in literary teaching in Finland.

In general, until the mid-20th century, literary knowledge and, through it, the strengthening of national identity seem to be at the heart of Finnish literary teaching (cf. Rikama 1990, 170). The next decades of the 20th century brought a new perspective to international literary research. The interest shifted from the authors, their living conditions, the cultural and historical background of the works to the texts themselves; Russian formalism and Anglo-American New Criticism emphasized the special features of a work of literary art. Literary text was considered as textual and artistic construction and it was also analyzed by taking a close look into various aspects of the text. The approach required analytical and critical literacy, which aims at *interpretation*.

New Criticism landed at Finnish universities and, as a result, at Finnish school education in the 1950s. The theory influenced the teaching of literature significantly, and it seems that the approach is still valid at least in Upper Secondary School. Koskela and Rojola has argued (1997, 30), that even today, the analysis and interpretation of literature in schools is based on New Criticism. Moreover, Leena Kirstinä (2011, 49) notes that the type of “analyze and interpret a text” assignment has been included in upper secondary school curricula since the 1985 curriculum. Kirstinä (2011, 50) has looked at this type of assignment and suggests that “analyze and interpret” is to be understood primarily as *a text-based close-reading exercise*, where the writer performs best if, in addition to the content, she notices, for example, motives, metaphor, contradictions and the ability to reflect on the narrator.

My eventual question is, is close reading still the most effective way to activate young people to fiction? Will the method help young people to become more active literary enthusiasts and readers in general?

### Bibliography:

Kirstinä, Leena, 2011. Analysoi ja tulkitse – klassikkotehtävä. Koivisto, P. ja Kiiskinen, S. (toim.) *Kirjallisuus liikkeessä: lajeja, käsitteitä, teorioita. Äidinkielen opettajain liiton vuosikirja*. Helsinki: Äidinkielen opettajain liitto, 49–58.

Koskela, L. & Rojola, L. 1997. *Lukijan ABC-kirja. Johdatus kirjallisuuden nykyteorioihin ja kirjallisuudentutkimuksen suuntauksiin*. Helsinki: SKS.

Elias Heikkonen

## **Evaluation of cultural literacy in Finnish upper secondary literature studies**

The most important means of evaluating upper secondary school students in the Finnish school system is through the Matriculation Examination, which evaluates if and how students have reached the goals of the National Core Curriculum for General Upper Secondary Schools (ÄDKM 24.8.2018, 1).

One of the main focuses of evaluation in the Finnish Matriculation Examination is cultural literacy, which can be understood as the general ability to understand different cultural meanings. It is therefore a fundamental type of literacy on which further forms such as critical literacy rest (Leino 2006, 595–596).

Because of the importance of the Matriculation Examination for the future of Finnish Upper Secondary School students (students apply to academic studies based on the results of the examination), the form of the examination and its evaluation principles play a significant role in defining the approaches to studying literature in upper secondary classrooms.

In this presentation I will examine how cultural literacy is understood in different tasks concerning literary fiction in the Finnish Matriculation Examinations from 2007 onwards. I will also compare this to the goals set for literature studies in the National Core Curriculums of 2003 and 2015 and how cultural literacy is understood in these documents. (LOPS 2003; LOPS 2015)

My aim is to study the possible discrepancies between how cultural literacy is understood in the National Core Curriculums and the Matriculation Examinations. From there I will further assess if and how the Matriculation Examination could be developed to more comprehensively evaluate the goals of literature studies set out in the National Core Curriculum.

### **Sources:**

Leino, P. (2006): Äidinkielen koe ja tekstitaidot. *Virittäjä* Vol. 110 Nro 4/2006, 590-598.  
<https://journal.fi/virittaja/article/view/40524/9950>

LOPS 2003 = Lukion opetussuunnitelman perusteet 2003. Helsinki: Opetushallitus 2003.

LOPS 2015= Lukion opetussuunnitelman perusteet 2015. Helsinki: Opetushallitus.  
[https://www.oph.fi/download/172124\\_lukion\\_opetussuunnitelman\\_perusteet\\_2015.pdf](https://www.oph.fi/download/172124_lukion_opetussuunnitelman_perusteet_2015.pdf)

ÄDKM 24.8.2018 = Äidinkielen digitaalisen kokeen määräykset. Ylioppilastutkintolautakunta  
[https://www.ylioppilastutkinto.fi/images/sivuston\\_tiedostot/Ohjeet/Koekohtaiset/fi\\_maaraykset\\_aidinkieli\\_digitaalinen\\_koe.pdf](https://www.ylioppilastutkinto.fi/images/sivuston_tiedostot/Ohjeet/Koekohtaiset/fi_maaraykset_aidinkieli_digitaalinen_koe.pdf)

Äidinkielen ylioppilaskokeet 2007. Ylioppilastutkintolautakunta.

Äidinkielen ylioppilaskokeet 2008–2018. Ylioppilastutkintolautakunta.  
<https://yle.fi/aihe/artikkeli/2015/12/15/yo-kokeet-aidinkieli>

ÄKA 2007–2012 = Äidinkielen tekstitaidon kokeen arviointiohjeet 2007–2012.  
Ylioppilastutkintolautakunnan äidinkielen jaos ja tehtäväryhmä; Äidinkielen opettajain liiton

lukuryhmä. <https://www.aidinkielenopettajainliitto.fi/jasensivut/materiaalipankki/ylioppilaskokeen-arviointi/>

ÄKHV 2013-2018 = Äidinkielen tekstitaidon kokeen hyvän vastauksen piirteet 2013–2018. Ylioppilastutkintolautakunta. <https://www.ylioppilastutkinto.fi/ylioppilastutkinto/hyvan-vastauksen-piirteet>

Kaisa Ilmonen

### **Towards an Intersectional Reading**

Changes in reading culture also requires changes in literary pedagogy. In this paper, my focus is on intersectionality and its possibilities for teaching literature in upper secondary schools. While critical race studies, queer studies, and feminist criticism have contributed greatly to research on education and critical pedagogical practices, intersectionality remains understudied in pedagogical context. Drawing on intersectional and social justice oriented reading strategies, I suggest frames for teaching literature intersectionally, emphasizing norm critical practices.

Intersectional pedagogy teaches, on the one hand, to understand interactions among the myriad sides of systemic oppression and privilege while also focusing on the situated nature of individual experience. Reading literature, on the other hand, develops understanding the place of the self and the other in the world, culturally, historically, and socially. Curtin, Stewart, and Cole (2015) have reported on positive effects of intersectional awareness in schools: it related to openness to experience, taking in to account the perspectives of others, intentions to create social change and rights-based action. Intersectionality deepens the understanding of the politics of positionality, while intersectional reading captures the complexity of social relations, experiences and structural dynamics that shape the diversity of young people's everyday life.

intersectionality has two organizational focal points, it is both a critical theory and a critical praxis. In my paper, I will combine these two focal points to literary pedagogy by analyzing how this critical theory enables reading as praxis in class rooms. I suggest that intersectional reading provides students the deepened understanding of simultaneous multiple identities and experiences.

Kaisa Ilmonen, PhD, Docent (Adjunct Professor in Minority Literatures)

Comparative Literature

Ilmonen works as a Senior Researcher in the project *How to Read? Forms of Reading in Teaching Literature in the Upper Secondary School*. A Project financed by Koneen Säätiö (Kone Foundation) for the years 2018–2020. Its researchers are from the University of Turku. <https://mitenluemme.wordpress.com/>