Deconstructing Video Clips in Class: Enhancing Secondary School Students' Critical Literacy in Digital Domains

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Abstract

Due to the recent decades of rapid digitalization digital multimodal texts have become increasingly common. Almost anyone can also produce, edit and publish texts which have resulted in an increasing necessity for critical literacy in order to handle texts in digital domains. The purpose of this article is to explore how students' critical literacy can be developed through in situ classroom activities. Grounding the study in sociocultural theories of learning and the concept of critical literacy, a design research approach was adopted, and an intervention was jointly designed by the researcher and the teachers. In focus was a class of 14-15-year-olds who were involved in activities of deconstructing a video clip from a popular teenage online series. Through interaction analysis of the classroom observations, it became evident that, by means of a step by step lesson structure, opportunities arise for increasing students' awareness of how modes function concurrently and carry both separate and interconnected meanings. Through this process, students also discovered that different modes can be contradictory, enabling enhanced critical analysis in their making meaning of the text.

Keywords: Critical literacy, design research, digital multimodal texts, secondary education instruction

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1. Introduction

Digitalisation has dramatically changed our ways of communicating, which has drawn increased attention to what it means to be literate in modern society. For instance, texts have become increasingly *digital*, that is, interactive and hyperlinked, and *multimodal*, that is, comprising language, audio, and still and moving images (Kress, 2010). This has called for an expanded notion of text that also includes, for example, video, websites, and advertising (e.g., New London Group, 2000). Further, reading and writing in digital domains arguably demand partially different competences, strategies, and knowledge than traditional print text, and many scholars have called for an expanded conceptualisation of literacy (e.g., Avila & Zacher Pandya, 2013; Freebody & Luke, 1990; Leu et al., 2013). Moreover, because of the interactive features of the internet, people of diverse ages, nationalities, and socioeconomic positions have been given the means to participate online. This potentially increases the opportunities to make more voices heard and to change social power relations in society, but it has also raised concerns when it comes to causing damage to democratic systems. For example, this can occur through the distribution of disinformation (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2016) or violations of the equal value of human beings. Although not all creators of texts set out to challenge democratic systems, we must counteract such tendencies by actively questioning how meaning is constructed, by whom, for what purposes, who benefits or is disadvantaged by the position taken, and how such conditions can be changed. Therefore, critically analysing and transforming texts in digital domains are also part of what it means to be literate in society today (e.g., Leu et al., 2013; UNESCO, 2013).

Education plays an important role in providing students with literacy skills for active citizenship. Enhancing the critical potential of students' literacy in digital domains is an important part of literacy education today (Janks, 2018), and it is the focus of the present study. The present study took place in a Swedish secondary school. In Sweden, most secondary school students have access to individual laptops or tablets for their learning. Hence, in this context, interacting with digital multimodal texts is also part of most adolescents' everyday literacy practices (Elf et al., 2018). The Swedish national curriculum emphasises analytical, critical, and transformative approaches to texts, for example, as being able to identify, interpret, and analyse messages and motives in texts, as well as to formulate one's positions (Swedish National Agency of Education, 2019). However, the

meanings and applications of such approaches in digital domains are not always obvious. Recent reports have stated that practices mainly focus on analogue texts and media rather than digital and multimodal texts. It also concerns determining trustworthiness and relevance in sources (Carlsson & Sundin, 2018; Swedish Schools Inspectorate, 2018). Such practices tend to position the user primarily as a recipient rather than a participant actively engaged in actions of transformation and change, which calls for an expanded notion of how critical and analytical approaches are interpreted and applied in classrooms (e.g., Janks, 2010; Pangrazio, 2017).

The present study employed the concept of *critical literacy* (Janks, 2010; Luke, 2012), which is a learning approach that seeks to describe how education can empower students to become critical, analytical, and transformative text users. This concept fundamentally concerns the relations between power, language, and meaning-making and the need for people to understand and engage in the politics of daily life in a democratic manner (Freire, 1972). For example, it implies that texts represent different versions of the world, where some voices are heard while others are silenced. In constructing a text, the creator must choose from a range of words, modes, or perspectives. Thus, every choice foregrounds what has been selected and hides, silences, or backgrounds what has not been not selected. Anything that has been constructed can also be *deconstructed*. This implies we can unmake a text by paying attention to the choices made by the creator and considering their effects. Therefore, involving students in the deconstruction of texts can enhance their awareness of how texts are constructed to position issues of motivation and dominance and constitute a basis of opportunities for transformation and change (Janks, 2018).

When people increasingly use digital tools to create, engage with, respond to, and share texts online, power constantly shifts. When texts increasingly rely on a combination of modes, the potential for carrying implicit ideological messages also increases. Thus, critical literacy in digital domains can offer new and more complex practices compared with approaches involving mainly traditional texts (Zacher Pandya et al., 2015). Educators and scholars from different traditions have proposed models for how literacy activities in the classrooms can be designed to target particular aspects of critical literacy in digital domains (e.g., Hinrichsen & Coombs, 2014; Janks, 2010; Jewitt, 2008; Lankshear & Knobel, 2004). One such model is the *five resources of critical digital literacy*

(Hinrichsen & Coombs, 2014), wherein the overarching aim of lesson design is to enable students' critical literacy, empowering them to use texts for self-expression and social change.

Based on this introductory reasoning, the present study aims to explore how education can enhance secondary school students' critical literacy in digital domains. As its theoretical basis, the study takes a sociocultural perspective of learning, which considers the use of language and texts as embedded in historical, social, and cultural contexts (Street, 1998; Vygotsky, 1978; Wertsch, 1998). Thus, the present study took place in situ in a class of 14–15-year-olds using individual laptops. It used a design research approach (Brown, 1992; McKenney & Reeves, 2012) to develop an intervention jointly designed by the researcher and the teacher to explore how literacy activities can be designed to enhance students' critical literacy. To address the aspects of critical literacy in digital domains, Hinrichsen and Coombs' (2014) five resources of critical digital literacy was used to inform the lesson design process, along with Janks' (2010) key works on literacy and power in educational practice. The activities took place within a Swedish language lesson. The students were guided step by step through a deconstruction of a common digital multimodal genre—a video clip—to draw their attention to how different modes, separate and in combination, construct meaning. The video clip was the one-minute introductory sequence of the first episode of the popular Norwegian teenage online series *Shame* (*Skam*). The series follows a group of upper secondary students' everyday lives, and it was chosen as a convenient focal text because of its multimodal construction and relevance to the literacy practices of the target group and due to its underlying theme of global guilt and dominance in the world.

To increase our understanding of how education can enhance secondary school students' critical literacy in digital domains, we need to understand how the different aspects of literacy activities become resources for student learning. For example, making aims clear and presenting what is educationally valuable for students in certain educational tasks are at the core of teaching and learning in classrooms. Therefore, the study employed Greiffenhagen's (2008) notion of unpacking tasks to analyse how tasks become formulated, progressively clarified, and used by students.

The following research question was addressed:

What opportunities for enhancing secondary school students' critical literacy in digital domains are afforded by a lesson design that explicitly focuses on students' deconstruction of a video clip from an online series?

2. Earlier empirical research on critical literacy in education

Several studies have provided insights into various pedagogical approaches towards critical literacy. For example, some have found that appealing to students' experiences and interests has the potential to increase critical and analytical approaches towards texts (e.g., Ajayi, 2015; Molin, Godhe & Lantz-Andersson, 2018; Pikelis, 2014; Schmier, 2013). Pikelis (2014) studied American Jewish university students' critical analyses of the depiction of impoverished people in an episode of the TV series *Seinfeld*. Although the students initially identified with Jewish representations in the series and found the positioning of Jews humorous and favourable, they gradually came to recognise how the show mocked poor and homeless people. Similarly, another study focused on reading activities among ninth-grade female Nigerian students (Ajayi, 2015). The students were explicitly taught to critically analyse how moving images worked to give meaning in a text relating to their own backgrounds and interests. The findings suggested that using students' interests and experiences led to high engagement, helping the students identify issues of power relations; this may challenge issues of social reproduction in multimodal texts and resist structural practices that diminish students' voices.

Studies have also shown that an awareness of how different expressions or modes construct meaning can increase students' critical literacy (e.g., Boske & McCormack, 2011; Huang, 2017; Lim & Kok Yin Tan, 2018; McNicol, 2016). Lim and Kok Yin Tan (2018) prompted a class of Singaporean secondary school students to identify how different modes constructed arguments that can reinforce a certain point of view in movie clips; their results showed that as students focused on the construction of the text, they gradually moved beyond a superficial, uninformed response to a critical and informed interpretation. Similarly, in Texas, Boske and McCormack (2011) studied how a class of Latino high school students developed critical literacy while working with selected clips from an animated movie. They found that by critically examining the construction of movie clips, the students became increasingly aware of the frequency of negative

images of Latinos. For example, it became clear to the students how seemingly trivial media products often reinforce stereotypes and prejudice. They also discovered connections between the protagonist, themselves, and others, allowing them to recognise issues of power inherent in the text. However, studies investigating students' deconstruction of texts in digital domains as a means for transformation and change remain quite limited.

3. Critical literacy: Theoretical perspectives and models

Understanding literacy activities from a sociocultural perspective entails that the social practice of literacy becomes the focus, rather than merely conventional reading and writing skills. Therefore, the role of literacy education is essentially to provide students access to literacy practices and discourse resources in their surrounding world (Freebody & Luke, 1990; Lankshear & Knobel, 2004). At the core of the literacy activities investigated in the present study is the students' *meaning-making* of modes. From a sociocultural perspective, people's need to make meaning of their surrounding world is understood as socially motivated. This implies that the messages conveyed through texts are not fixed but become meaningful as they are interpreted and used in various social contexts. Thus, as the students in the present study take part in activities to make meaning of how various messages are constructed through a combination of modes, their meaning-making is integrated into the social and cultural context (Luke & Freebody, 1999).

The concept of critical literacy frames the aim and research question of the present study and further refers to the analysis, critique, and transformation of the norms, rule systems, and practices governing the social fields of institutions and everyday life (Avila & Zacher Pandya, 2013; Freire, 1972; Janks, 2010). Moreover, it espouses that education can foster social justice and democratic participation by allowing students to recognise how language is affected by and influences social relations (Luke, 2012). Thus, being embedded in literacy practices in classrooms, critical literacy provides opportunities for students to discern and identify the purpose and ideologies present in contemporary texts. This becomes part of the process of becoming conscious of one's experience as culturally and historically constructed within specific relations of dominance.

Even though the object of analysis here is the social, cultural, and historical practices where digital multimodal texts are included, the multimodal aspects of the texts are a focal point. The concept of multimodality refers to when two or more modes (e.g., visual, gestural, or auditory) are combined in a variety of ways to make meaning. Each mode contributes to the overall meaning of the multimodal ensemble in a specific way, but the infinite combinations of modes made possible in digital domains also simultaneously activate several layers of a story (Kress, 2010; Unsworth, 2014). This provides the user with several possible options, and alternative interpretations and readings may emerge across modes (Bearne, 2009; Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2001). In the storytelling format of the online series *Shame*, the characters could, for example, engage in a dialogue while simultaneously having a text conversation, and both modes are visible to the viewer. Text conversations and musical loops in the background are also often presented simultaneously, but at the same time, because they can be interpreted together, they also have functions on their own (Van Leeuwen, 2015). For example, visual modes in the series could indicate one option, but other modes also become organised by the characters in the series, influencing what the viewer observes. For example, this is evident when one of the main characters turns the music up on the stereo for the lyrics to become clearer or picks up the phone after hearing a sound from an arriving text message. Thus, part of enhancing students' critical literacy in digital domains includes raising their awareness that there is a baseline of combined modes driving the narrative forward in multimodal text and that there are other modes requiring action from the viewer (Hinrichsen & Coombs, 2014; Janks, 2010).

In the present study, the five resources model of critical digital literacy underpinned the lesson design (Hinrichsen & Coombs, 2014). This model offers a reinterpretation of Freebody and Luke's (1990) widely adopted work 'the four resources model', which states that to become literate, students must learn to approach texts by simultaneously employing practices of decoding, meaning-making, functional use, and critical analysis/transformation. Hinrichsen and Coombs (2014) expanded their interpretation to involve aspects of using texts in digital domains. Practices of *decoding* include developing familiarity with the structures and conventions of digital media and sensitivity to the different modes at work. *Meaning-making* in a digital domain requires reflexive processing of the content, such as following and creating narratives across diverse semantic, visual,

and structural elements. The *functional use* of texts involves the ability to deploy digital tools appropriately and effectively for the task at hand. Furthermore, *critical analysis and transformation* imply the ability to discern the elements contributing to the meanings, uses, and messages of digital texts and the use of this knowledge for transformation and change. Finally, for sensitivity to the issues of reputation identity and membership of participatory cultures online, *persona* was added as a fifth resource; it refers to purposeful management and calibration of one's online persona in digital domains (Hinrichsen & Coombs, 2014). Although the model considers the five practices as interconnected and of equal importance, critical literacy work may pay close attention to only a few practices at a time. In the present study, for example, the activity of deconstructing a video clip involved only focusing on the practices of decoding and meaning-making and, to a limited extent, critical analysis.

4. Methods

The empirical material of the lesson analysed in this study was gathered in a Swedish urban secondary school in 2016–2017. The research involved a class of 16 students—nine girls and seven boys, aged 14–15 years—and one teacher of Swedish. Because the school provided all students with individual laptops and had a local policy of fostering cooperative skills and critical literacy among students, it provided a convenient setting for exploring how education can enhance students' critical literacy in digital domains.

The study used a design research approach (McKenny & Reeves, 2012) to incorporate and develop a lesson design involving students in exploring how different modes in a video clip construct meaning. The two main goals of design research are to be both pragmatic and theory oriented. Its application is systematic, interventional, collaborative, iterative, and adaptive. The intervention design was the result of three collaborative meetings between the teacher and the researcher. To yield a common knowledge base, the design process began with a literature review. The researcher proposed literature on critical literacy to inform lesson design (e.g., Avila & Zacher Pandya, 2013; Hinrichsen & Coombs, 2014; Janks, 2010), and the teacher proposed literature on the instructional aspects of digitalised classrooms (e.g., Fleischer & Kvarnsell, 2015). Janks (2010) noted that in order to develop an understanding of the aspects of power in society, students need to encounter

a broad spectrum of perspectives through texts. Apart from providing access to the dominant forms, this entails acknowledging texts representing students' previous interests and experiences. For example, drawing upon students' previous experiences of texts and genres in an effective way has resulted in raising engagement and potentially challenging the social reproduction of power relations (e.g., Ajayi, 2015). Thus, to address common literacy experiences and interests among students (cf. Janks, 2010), the teacher suggested using the online series *Shame.* The series applied a transmedia storytelling format using online media platforms, which was considered close to the students' communicative patterns of using mobile phones and media. Moreover, the narrative was constructed through real-time snippets distributed across the week, which conveyed a sense of authenticity and opportunities for identification (Bom, 2018). The introductory sequence used for the activities serves as a threshold text for the whole series and comprises several rapid video clips representing the happy, privileged, and decadent lives of Norwegian teenagers. Across the whole sequence, Jonas, one of the main characters, reads aloud from a school essay about the opportunities of economic liberalism and how the privileged live at the expense of the poor. Thus, the focal text was convenient not only because of its relevance to the age group and its multimodal construction but also due to its theme of dominance.

The activity of exploring how different modes in a video clip construct meaning was largely new to the students. According to the sociocultural perspective on learning (Vygotsky, 1978), particularly framing receiving support from a more knowledgeable person is an important aspect of the learning process before performing a task independently (Wood et. al., 1976). Therefore, to potentially enhance students' awareness of the ways in which different modes carry meanings, the lesson involved introducing new aspects through step-by-step instruction, focusing on one mode at a time. Moreover, a productive lesson is often designed to switch between the 'instruction' and 'doing' phases (Greiffenhagen, 2008). Thus, the instruction phases of paying attention to one mode at a time were alternated with doing phases, where students shared their individual reflections in small groups.

4.1 Collection, analysis, and presentation of the empirical material

The empirical data include a combination of video recordings (totalling one hour) and field notes from the focal activity. The video recordings were used to document the whole-class activities. Two cameras were used: one capturing the overview angle of the classroom, with temporary shifts or foci on smaller groups, and one camera capturing the teacher at the front. To complement the video data, the researcher took the field notes while circulating between the groups.

The analysis of the material drew on Greiffenhagen's (2008) notion of unpacking tasks. Focusing on locally accomplished tasks embedded in educational practices allows for exploring how the tasks can operate as meaning-making devices in students' activities (Greiffenhagen, 2008). This is visible in the initial specification of the task, where the match with what students actually do may be indicative of their success or failure in understanding the initial instructions. Therefore, analysing how different aspects of the instruction and phases of the activities contribute to meaning-making in students' activities may explicate some notable and generalisable features of the lesson design. Furthermore, an interaction analysis (Jordan & Henderson, 1995) was used to support the study of knowledge and action as socially constituted, that is, situated in the interactions between participants while they conducted activities. Studying interactions in classrooms entails focusing on what students and teachers say and how they engage with different tools.

To describe the classroom activities and interactions taking place, the material is presented as transcribed excerpts from the video recordings. The first step in the data analysis was creating an overview of the empirical material through broad transcriptions. Then, longer interactions relevant to the research question were reviewed and transcribed thoroughly. In the transcribed excerpts, the annotation (.) is adapted for a brief pause and *(italic text)* for nonverbal activity, in accordance with Jefferson's (1984) conventions. From this material, sequences of particular interest were selected for further analysis. These sequences were chosen because they illustrate diverse aspects of how students' critical literacy in digital domains can be enhanced. The second step involved a careful analysis focusing on the teacher's instructions, the different phases of setting and following tasks, and the ways in which the activities contributed to the students' critical literacy. Watching

the same sequence numerous times also clarified how the students and teacher acted and how the activities can be analytically described. Subsequently, analytical claims could be made about the way particular cases could potentially enhance secondary school students' critical literacy in digital domains.

The empirical material comprises communication between 14–15-year-old students, so the excerpts have been translated from Swedish into colloquial English. In most cases, the translations have been done verbatim, but also with respect to the interpretation of the specific activity (Duranti, 1997).

4.2 Ethical considerations

The study adhered to the Swedish Research Council's (2017) ethical guidelines, including requirements for confidentiality, consent, information, and autonomy. All parents signed a consent form, and the students were informed about the research; this included their options for consenting to be video and audio recorded, as well as their ability to terminate their participation at any time. All students in the excerpts actively consented to participate. Pseudonyms are used to meet the requirements of confidentiality.

5. Empirical findings

This section presents the activities of deconstructing the opening sequence of *Shame*. The examples and excerpts illustrate how the activities of focusing on one mode at a time are conveyed through the teacher's (T) and students' interaction. Each example is followed by an analysis to determine whether the different aspects of the instruction and doing phases provide opportunities to enhance students' critical literacy in digital domains.

5.1. Setting the task

In the first part of the lesson, the teacher introduces the context, background and purpose of the activity. This includes explaining that they are going to critically approach the opening sequence of the Norwegian series *Shame* through several tasks in which new aspects are gradually introduced.

Excerpt 1 illustrates how the teacher brings the students' attention to how meaning is constructed in digital multimodal texts.

Excerpt 1

(Teacher = T throughout all excerpts; Ida = I)

01 T: Anyway (.) we are going to focus on something new. You know (.) we often talk

02   about how you need to be critical of things you read.

03   Especially when you read things online (.) Do you follow? What does this mean?

04   [...]

05   *(Ida raises her hand)*

06 T: Yes, Ida.

07 I: That you must know whether things are true or false.

08 T: Right! That's super important. But when we talk about texts here (.) and I want

09   you to know that texts can even be videos or the pictures on a web

10   page. When we do that in class (.) we also sometimes talk about what the author

11   wants to say (.) if there are any ideological points of view (.) kind of to

12   read between the lines. And you need to think about these things to understand

13   whose voice is being heard in the text. That there is sometimes only one

14   perspective. Do you remember?

15   *(Some of the students nod)*

16 T: Most of the time when we have talked about such things and analysed the texts,

17   we have focused on the narrative of the story. What it is about and what it

18   says. But we don't talk very much about how the text is made. And we have talked

19   very little about all the things that are used to construct a digital text (.)

20   for example, pictures and audio (.) what they mean.

Excerpt 1 is an example of how the contextualisation of the task becomes a way of bringing students' attention to how modes construct meaning (cf. Greiffenhagen, 2008). Here, this is done by invoking what they have done previously regarding the importance of being critical towards texts that are found online (e.g., lines 1, 2, and 10–12). The teacher also seeks to confirm this previous knowledge by asking the students, 'Do you remember?' (line 14). By alternating between

invoking previous experiences and introducing new aspects (e.g., lines 9 and 18), the teacher then gradually introduces the topic and the larger picture of the activity. In this way, the instruction provides opportunities for the students to become involved in what is going to happen, highlighting that their previous knowledge is valuable for understanding something new (Vygotsky, 1978). The value of students' prior knowledge is also visible because the teacher seeks to confirm whether the activity is in line with students' expectations (line 3). Ida replies and refers to the notion of determining whether things are true or false (line 7). Critical practices focusing on determining trustworthiness and relevance in texts are common in Swedish classrooms (Carlsson & Sundin, 2018). Hence, Ida's reply was to be expected, and the teacher acknowledges this prior knowledge by stating that it is important (line 8). However, the teacher continues by elaborating on what it means 'to be critical of things you read' (line 2) by including that it is about being aware of not only the truth of statements but also aspects such as the authors' intentions, the text's potential 'ideological points of view', and the need for them 'kind of to read between the lines' (lines 11 and 12). The teacher continues to concretise what it could imply 'to be critical of things you read' (line 2), saying that it involves 'whose voice is being heard' (line 13), 'how the text is made' (line 18), and what 'all the things that are used to construct a digital text, for example, pictures and audio' mean (lines 19–20). By also stating that this is not the most common way of discussing texts, which the class often does by talking about 'the narrative' (line 17), the teacher draws their attention to the fact that this is another way of analysing texts. The teacher brings the students' attention to the upcoming task by exemplifying how 'to be critical of things you read' (line 2) in terms of explicating how such a critical approach to digital multimodal texts can be expanded and deconstructed by focusing on how various modes create intertwined meaning. Thus, the teacher's elaborations and concrete examples in the introductory phase of the lesson are analytically understood as offering opportunities for the students to practice a critical literacy perspective. Thereby, the first phase of the activity presents instructions aiming to support students' understanding that being critical is a more extensive practice than what they have worked with before. Moreover, the task is not entirely established through the initial formulations but is progressively clarified in the social interactions through subsequent work (cf. Greiffenhagen, 2008; Jordan & Henderson, 1995).

5.2 Paying attention to different modes

In the next instruction phase of setting the task, the teacher directs the focus more specifically to the activity, that is, paying attention to how different modes construct meaning. First, this implies introducing the content and the aim of the task, as seen in Excerpt 2.

Excerpt 2

21 T:	This time, I want you guys to pay more attention to (.) more in detail (.) to how
22	this kind of digital multimodal text (.) is made (.) or constructed. You see (.)
23	there are so many things, like sound, lights, pictures, and so on (.) and these
24	mean things too. We'll see what you think about it.
25	[...]
26	I want us to try to pay attention to these things today, because I want you to
27	start reading these things more critically. I want you to start discovering how
28	important these things, or modes, are for our comprehension of texts.

In this sequence, the teacher specifies what the students are going to do soon (lines 21 and 22), informs them of her expectations (lines 21 and 26–28), and motivates why she finds the task important (lines 23, 24, and 28). Some central concepts are also introduced, such as 'digital multimodal texts' and 'construction' (line 22) and 'mode' (line 28). These are all new to the students, and the teacher assists in their understanding, either by using synonyms such as a 'text is made or constructed' or by referring to 'these things' (line 28) after having mentioned a few examples of modes. The concept of digital multimodal texts is not further elaborated on. However, because the concept of mode is at the core of the activities, the students' understanding of this concept is crucial. Therefore, the teacher exemplifies this by giving several examples of modes that might be present in the video clip, such as 'sounds, lights, and pictures' (line 23). By highlighting and providing examples of modes, the teacher explicitly supports the students' awareness of modes in texts. This is in line with Hinrichsen and Coombs' (2014) reasoning of how decoding aspects of the meaning-making practice can be emphasised: comprehension implies paying attention to the different modes presented in the texts. By also directing the students' attention to the fact that all modes in a video clip online have meaning (lines 23 and 24), the teacher affords the students the

opportunity to understand that each mode bears meaning separately but also contributes to the overall meaning in a specific way (Unsworth, 2014).

As with Excerpt 1, this sequence is part of the initial phase of setting the task. Greiffenhagen (2008) suggests the importance of students becoming aware of the objective before performing it. The phase of setting the task is often characterised by several instruction phases aimed at contributing to this awareness. However, by highlighting and providing examples of modes, this phase is more detailed than in Excerpt 1, describing more precisely what the teacher expects the students to do (lines 26–28). Thus, the instruction phase presented in Excerpt 2 also serves as an introduction to the first doing phase of the lesson: watching the first episode of the series.

5.3 Focusing on the role of modes

The first doing phase of the lesson is watching the 25-minute first episode without any further instruction; there is no particular follow-up. Instead, the students are guided to the next task by being instructed that they are now supposed to pay close attention to one mode at a time. The opening sequence of the episode is in focus, as illustrated in Excerpt 3.

Excerpt 3

29 T: Okay. The part of *Shame* we are going to focus on particularly is the introduction.

30   I want you to pay attention to how it is made, with pictures and audio and so

31   on (.) We'll watch it a few times and I'll tell you to pay attention to specific

32   things.

33   *(The teacher turns back to the computer to start the episode from the beginning)*

34 T: If you become more attentive to how the text is constructed (.) you get closer to

35   the text and it becomes easier to read critically when you discover, for example,

36   how the audio is used.

Like Excerpts 1 and 2, this sequence, in which the teacher brings the students' attention to the text in focus for the task, is an example of how prior knowledge becomes an important aspect of instruction. Contextualising and preparing for reading support students' meaning-making of texts (e.g., Freebody & Luke, 1990). For example, even though the genre of video clips was considered

close to the students' experiences, watching the whole first episode contextualises the text, potentially facilitating and assisting students' opportunities for meaning-making of the task and the texts at hand. Moreover, although *Shame* was popular among adolescents at the time, not all students were followers of it. Thus, the purpose of contextualising the video clip into the broader scope of the series also becomes a way of providing a common point of departure in the activities and making classroom activities more equal for all (Janks, 2010; Luke, 2012).

Further, as shown in Excerpt 3, it is crucial to support students' sense-making of the subsequent activities. This entails telling the students what part of *Shame* they are going to focus on, what the upcoming doing phase is about, and how the task is to be performed (lines 31 and 32). Another aspect is motivating the relevance of the activity by again connecting to the overall aim of the lesson to improve the students' critical awareness of the role that different modes play in constructing meaning or particular representations of the world (lines 34–36).

After this, the students move to the second doing phase: watching the opening sequence. Next, they are prompted to discuss with peers what they understand from the narrative. More specifically, the teacher asks them to pay attention to the narrative and what it is about and to try to identify some modes. In the whole-group discussion that follows, the teacher asks a few students to share their ideas.

Excerpt 4

(Adam = A; Sophie = S)

37 T: Okay everyone. What did you find out from this?

38 A: He [the narrative voice of Jonas] says that the way we live in the Western world

39   is a kind of burden shouldered by the poor farmers in Peru.

40 T: Right! What else?

41   *(Sophie raises her hand)*

42 T: Yes, Sophie!

43 S: Eh (.) in the first part, all the young people are happy, and the sky is blue. The

44   later part feels kind of (.) more depressive. Jonas says something about what's bad

45   about economic liberalism and then the pictures turn darker and tragic.

Excerpt 4 provides an example of the doing phase, in which students are encouraged to share their understanding of a previous instruction, thereby providing the space for the students to demonstrate how they have understood the task (cf. Greiffenhagen, 2008). Both student answers reflect the teacher's prompt to pay attention to the narrative and share how they understand different modes from the clip. For example, Adam (lines 38 and 39) has paid attention to the narrative and what it is about; he elaborates on the central theme of global guilt by referring to the narrative voice of Jonas and the moral imperative of how our lavish Western lives are a burden to the poor in the world. Thus, this serves as an example of the deconstruction of modes becoming a resource for the meaning-making of texts (cf. Hinrichsen & Coombs, 2014).

Jonas' traditional narrative is also important for Sophie's meaning-making of the texts. However, she focuses on how several modes work together to construct meaning (lines 43–45). This is evident, for example, when she states that 'the sky is blue' at the beginning of the video clip, which becomes a resource for her interpretation of happiness (line 43). Likewise, the darkness at the end represents the negative aspects of economic liberalism (lines 44 and 45), as Jonas' narrative voice conveys. Thus, Sophie's example shows that identifying modes might be a complex task because decoding them together constitutes an important resource for meaning-making (Hinrichsen & Coombs, 2014; Kress, 2010).

5.4 Focusing on auditive modes

In the next step of the activity, the lesson turned into another instructional phase. The students are now instructed to watch the opening sequence again and pay close attention to the audio. Here, the students are prompted to close their eyes or turn around and listen to what they can hear. They are also asked to think about whether they have discovered anything new this time. The video clip begins, and the students listen carefully. Then, another short peer group discussion follows, and the teacher again asks the students to share their thoughts with the whole class.

Excerpt 5

(Linn = L; John = J; Adam = A)

46 T: Okay. What did you hear?

47   Yes, Linn!

48 L: It gets more serious in the middle (.) You hear Jonas saying 'death and passion' (.)

49   and then you hear a glass bottle (.) being crushed. And you also hear someone

50   vomiting.

51 T: Right (.) Anyone else?

52 A: And sirens.

53 L: Right!

54 T: John!

55 J: It sounds as if Jonas' voice is getting more intense at the end (.)

56   You know when he says those things about how bad things become in

57   other parts of the world (.) kind of a more rapid talk (.) I sense.

By asking the students to pay attention to the auditive modes, the teacher adds another supportive structure. In the doing phase described in Excerpt 5, it becomes evident that the instruction phase directs the students' attention to the audio in their performance of the task, supporting them in identifying additional aspects of sounds and the role that sound plays in constructing meaning in the sequence. An example is when Linn says that the narrative becomes more serious in the middle, when Jonas' spoken words of 'death and passion' coincide with the sound of a glass bottle 'being crushed' and 'someone vomiting' (lines 48–50). This shows how the instruction to close their eyes and focus solely on the auditive mode supports the students' meaning-making of the clip (cf. Kress, 2010). It also offers an example of an awareness of how the spoken mode and other auditive modes work together (cf. Bearne, 2009).

John also senses negativity when paying attention to the different auditive modes; this becomes evident when he notices the rise in intensity in Jonas' narrative voice (line 55). Thus, the decoding of the audio constitutes a resource for interpretation and meaning-making (Hinrichsen & Coombs, 2014) because he relates the increase in intensity to Jonas' narrative about the downside of the rich world living at the expense of the poor.

Excerpt 5 shows that instructing students to close their eyes allows them to isolate the audio mode. Thus, the supportive structure of paying attention to only one mode enables the students to develop an awareness of the existence of separate modes side by side in a multimodal text and to decipher meanings of significance for a complete understanding of the texts.

5.5 Focusing on visual modes

In the final doing phase, the students are prompted to watch the opening sequence once again. This time, the task is to focus on the visual aspects of the texts with the audio turned off. The teacher also asks the students to focus on whether visual modes add anything new to what they have already noticed. After watching the video clip, the students talk with their peers and then share their ideas with the whole class, as illustrated in Excerpt 6.

Excerpt 6

(Anne = A; Jenny = J; Filip = F)

58 A: I think Jonas says something about us being sick due to junk food (.) that's

59   probably when the greasy hamburgers turn up.

60   [...]

61 J: When watching the first time, it was hard to see the faces of people. It went so

62   quickly. But when watching now, you recognise some of the characters in the series.

63   But (.) [I] wonder why none of the main characters are visible?

64 F: Yeah (.) I was thinking (.) didn't he talk about poor farmers in India and Peru at the

65   end? Now, there only seem to be young people dancing at that point. It doesn't

66   correspond to what is said. Don't get it really.

Although the students are prompted to pay attention only to the visual modes, Excerpt 6 shows that their meaning-making of the texts now also relates to what they have paid attention to in the previous rounds of watching the clip. Thus, corresponding to Greiffenhagen's (2008) reasoning, the activity is not entirely established through the instruction but is progressively clarified through the students' subsequent work. More specifically, when the students highlight visual modes, such

as greasy hamburgers (line 59), the faces of characters in the series (line 62), and young people dancing (line 65), this also relates to the decoding of other aspects for their meaning-making of the clip (cf. Bearne, 2009; Janks, 2010; Hinrichsen & Coombs, 2014).

For example, Ann refers to what she recognised earlier when focusing on the audio (line 58). Contrasting this previous experience to the present focus on only the visual enables her to identify how different modes resonate with each other when constructing meaning—that is, the auditive mode of junk food resonates with the visual mode of a greasy hamburger (line 59). Furthermore, Jenny states that it was hard to see people's faces when watching for the first time, but watching it again enabled her to recognise some of the characters (lines 61 and 62). This example shows that watching the same sequence several times and paying attention to different modes can increase the opportunities to discover new aspects (cf. Pikelis, 2014). However, it also shows that some parts of meaning-making depend on the fact that the students initially watched the whole first episode of the series. Jenny's opportunities to decode and make meaning of the visual aspects then depend on her prior knowledge of the characters in the series, which highlights the importance of the contextual aspects of the activity (cf. Hinrichsen & Coombs, 2014).

The examples of Jenny and Filip also show how aspects of critical literacy are potentially enhanced. For example, patterns of critical analysis are observable in Jenny's inquiry about why the main characters are not visible (line 63). Accordingly, the focus on modes allows the student to raise new inquiries that contribute to the meaning-making of the clip. Further, Filip's deconstruction of the visual aspects uncovers a mismatch between different modes. When he refers to the previous phases of watching the video clip, he recognises that what Jonas' narrative conveys about poor farmers does not correspond to the visual mode of young people dancing (lines 65 and 66). The analysis of this last part shows that despite being instructed to focus particularly on the visual modes, the students move beyond this focus in the deconstruction process and start paying attention to how different modes can resonate or mismatch, becoming either resources or disturbances in their meaning-making of texts (cf. Pikelis, 2014). Hence, opportunities to enhance critical literacy are made possible because of the focus on one mode at a time, and inquiries develop when different modes support each other, but they also arise in encounters of perceived mismatched modes.

6. Discussion and conclusions

The present study aimed to explore how education can enhance secondary school students' critical literacy in digital domains. It investigated an intervention designed in collaboration between the researcher and a teacher, where students in an in situ classroom were involved in deconstructing a video clip from an online series. The lesson design involves a structure comprising phases of instruction and doing. The instruction phases were designed to ultimately support the focus on the goal of the lesson and to make the students aware of aspects of the task before performing it. Furthermore, the doing phases were designed to support the students' application of new knowledge by recurrently inviting them to reflect more freely on the task in small groups. Overall, the analysis reveals how opportunities are offered for the students to apply a critical literacy perspective in digital domains. This is done through an explicit lesson design that, in a step-by-step structure, guided the students forward in paying attention to the role that different modes play in constructing meaning.

The study confirms previous knowledge which argues that taking students' prior knowledge and experiences into consideration is a key aspect for learning (e.g., Gibbons, 2016). The initial instruction phase of setting the task is one example of how such a curricular context was provided. For the students to become aware and make meaning when focusing on one mode at a time, the initial phase contained several steps that gradually brought the students closer to the first doing phase. Apart from presenting *Shame* as the focal text and directing students' attention to the upcoming activity, the teacher introduced the 'new' aspects by relating what was now new to previous classroom work on critical literacy (as described in Excerpt 1). The initial phase also included confirming the students' understanding of what it means to be critical. A student's response turned out not to be in line with the objective of the activity, and the teacher's reaction became an example of how social interaction enables teachers to identify the ways in which students unpack the tasks at hand. Thus, progressively clarifying, adjusting, and orienting the task towards the intended goal (cf. Greffenhagen, 2008) as a response to students' prior knowledge and experience does not only become a key aspect of learning in general. It also becomes a matter of social inclusion, potentially enhancing students' understanding of the relationship between access

and power and taking teaching to the core of critical literacy (cf. Boske & McCormack, 2011; Janks, 2010; Pikelis, 2014).

The empirical findings also show that the recurrent alternation between the instruction and doing phases of paying attention to different modes created opportunities for the students to gradually become aware that decoding modes is an important part of making meaning of a video clip. Consequently, the findings are in line with earlier research arguing that developing familiarity with and sensitivity to the structure of different modes at work opens up opportunities for students to enhance their awareness of how to follow, interpret and analyse text narratives in digital domains (cf. Lim & Kok Yin Tan, 2018; Pikelis, 2014). However, the analysis of the whole-class interactions revealed that even though the students were instructed to pay attention to one mode at a time, they also highlighted the ensembles of modes and how the modes supported each other to construct meaning. Thus, they sometimes expanded their focus and showed an awareness of how modes are deliberately chosen to work together to convey meaning (cf. Hinrichsen & Coombs, 2014; Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2001).

The study also confirms previous research arguing that when combined, modes potentially offer the viewer several layers to engage in (cf. Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2001). For example, the students were challenged when finding that the modes in the video clip were combined in contradictory ways, and their meaning-making of the text became affected as they alternated between decoding among these different modes (e.g., Excerpt 6). In order to make meaning of such contradictions and acknowledge that there might be a combination of modes that drive the narrative forward as well as modes that have contradictory meanings requiring action from the user (Janks, 2010), the students had to use other resources than the instruction phases of focusing on one mode at a time. The findings suggest that doing phases in which students are invited to discuss and exchange their experiences with peers and share their reflections in the whole class are particularly valuable for such meaning-making challenges. For example, the interaction analysis shows how students raised questions about the intended meaning, and critical inquiries emerged when they tried to make meaning of their perception of mismatched modes.

In a democratic and digital society, there is an increasing need for critical literacy. Knowledge of how texts make some voices heard while others are silenced becomes particularly relevant in a world where power lies in the hands of those who know how to create, share, and disseminate texts online. The present study has demonstrated that instruction and doing phases of paying attention to how modes exist side by side and construct meaning in a video clip are a successful teaching strategy for increasing students' critical literacy in digital domains. Not only does it make the students aware of the role of modes, but through peer group reflections, the students can also become aware that the multiple combinations of modes made possible in digital domains can give rise to alternative interpretations (cf. Bearne, 2009).

There were, of course, limitations to the present study (cf. Yin, 2012). The study covered only one example of a lesson in a technology-rich classroom, and the number of participants was limited to those in one class. Hence, it does not claim to provide a complete picture of a classroom practice. The contribution of the present study is one of many possible detailed examples of how critical literacy aspects can be incorporated in a lesson design. Thus, through the design-based approach of this study, where a phenomenon in the natural setting of ongoing schooling is explored, some conclusions can be drawn that are of general significance to the educational practice. For instance, the design of the study involved a close collaboration between the teacher and the researcher. Designing research by taking the needs and issues of a local school setting as the point of departure enables learning about real-world issues, with implications for future researchers and practitioners alike.

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