Re-creating (hi)stories: Social and cultural empowerment

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In response to the challenge to educate democratic citizens and prepare them for life in a global and digital world, a teaching design that focuses on stories that re-claim a place in the literary tradition for groups of people who have been marginalised or silenced in literary classics has been developed and implemented in the upper secondary EFL classroom. The aim of this article is to analyse essays where upper secondary school students compare *Anne of Green Gables* to *Anne with an E* in order to discuss how transmedia storytelling can function as social and cultural empowerment and encourage global and critical awareness. The method is design-based research, and the data consist of 89 comparative essays that have been thematically analysed, resulting in four themes: altered mood, altered characters, added characters, and the function and effect of transmedia storytelling. The results show that the students focus on new themes and characters, which are easier to relate to. By comparing the source text to the makeover, they notice that *Anne with an E* sheds light on aspects which are missing in *Anne of Green Gables*. As they compare, they question the historical accuracy of both the source text and the makeover, thus demonstrating critical awareness.

Keywords: intersectionality, knowledge-in-action, literature education, makeover, transmedia storytelling

1. Introduction

The globalised and digitalised society of today places high demands on education to engage with cultural diversity, integrate global awareness, and develop students' digital competencies. This article addresses these issues by reporting on a project which applies a teaching design that uses examples of transmedia storytelling that re-claim a place in the literary tradition for groups of people who have been marginalised or silenced in literary classics. The project aims to encourage students' social, cultural, global and critical awareness in the upper secondary EFL classroom in Sweden.

This project is a response to challenges identified by research and educational practice. One such challenge is the school's mission to educate democratic citizens and prepare students for life in a global and digital world. One of the core values of the Swedish school is to convey and anchor respect for human rights and fundamental values (SKOLFS 2011:144); therefore, it is important to focus on diversity and inclusion in all school subjects.

A second challenge is posed by today's media-dense society, of which school is a large part. Children and teenagers spend much time using stories in various types of media and thus gain narrative competence across media boundaries and across media platforms. In this media-dense society, teachers face the challenge of recognising the opportunities for varied learning provided by the screen culture. One way in which teachers can take advantage of this opportunity is to use a storyworld, or parts thereof, as re-presented in various medial and aesthetic forms of expression, a *text universe*, as learning sites (Svensson & Lundström, 2019). One such text universe is Anne of Green Gables. An analysis of the Anne of Green Gables text universe suggests that the variety of texts not only provides more opportunities for experiences than a single text but also places new demands on the reader (Svensson & Lundström, 2019).

A third challenge, which is identified by English teachers at the upper secondary level and addresses these new demands on students as readers, involves students' understanding of fiction on various levels. Here, the focus is on, for example, what makes a literary classic valid today and what the effects of re-telling a story in a similar or altered way are, while at the same time discovering how various re-presentations of classics can facilitate an awareness of past issues that remain relevant today.

In response to these challenges, a teaching design was created with three upper secondary school teachers in the subject of English. The design focuses on stories that re-create (hi)story through processes of transmedia storytelling. To encourage comparison, this design uses a literary classic that is read in the EFL classroom at upper secondary level, Montgomery's (1908) *Anne of Green Gables*, in combination with two different re-presentations, Sullivan's (1985) *Anne of Green Gables* and Wheeler and Walley Beckett's (2017–2019) *Anne with an E*. The design has so far been implemented once, and this article reports on the results of the first cycle.

1.1 Aim and research questions

As part of a project that aims to test and develop a teaching design focusing on re-creating (hi)stories, the aim of this article is to analyse essays where upper secondary school students have been tasked with comparing Montgomery's *Anne of Green Gables* to Wheeler and Walley Beckett's *Anne with an E* in order to discuss how transmedia storytelling can function as social and cultural empowerment, and encourage global and critical awareness. Hence, the study is based on the following research questions:

- What aspects, for example, themes and characters, do the students discuss when they compare *Anne of Green Gables* to *Anne with an E*?
- What effects do they see of the process of transmedia storytelling?

2. Background

One core value of the Swedish school is to convey and anchor respect for human rights and the fundamental values on which Swedish society is based (SKOLFS 2011:144). Therefore, it is important that the educational system is based on democratic values (SKOLFS 2011:144). In a recently published dissertation on the political implications of literature education as a means to foster democratic values in an age of measurability, Borsgård (2021) discusses the democratic mission in relation to literature education. Borsgård's (2021) findings show that the participating teachers are "positive towards teaching literature as a means of democratic socialization"(p. 227), but they are affected by expanded administrative duties and the limits of pedagogical choices created by the syllabus. The broad democratic mission of the Swedish school stipulates that education should promote the understanding of other people and the ability to empathise.

Furthermore, education must be characterised by openness and respect for people's differences (SKOLFS 2011:144). These goals call for an education where diversity and inclusion are central concepts. Therefore, education should embody and convey the values of the inviolability of human life, the freedom and integrity of the individual, the equal value of all people, equality between women and men, and solidarity between people (SKOLFS 2011:144). The overarching mission is to foster democratic citizens and prepare them for life in a global world.

In addition to preparing students for life in a global world, school also must prepare them for life in a digital world. The media landscape of today is described as consisting of plural, overlapping and simultaneous processes of media use that focus on, for example, *transmedia* (Kinder, 1991), *transmedia storytelling* (Jenkins, 2007), *cross-media* (Paul Zazzera, 1995, referred to in Giovagnoli, 2011), *remediation* (Bolter & Grusin, 1999), and *convergence culture* (Jenkins, 2006). These processes exemplify a media-dense society, which affects, among other things, the way stories are created, re-created, and used. Connecting today's media-dense society to the circulation of stories, Ryan and Thon (2014) focus on how storyworlds, that is, "represented worlds [that function] as sites of creative activity in which cultures elaborate their collective social imaginary" (p. 19), are transferred across media. Given that storyworlds depend on evolving transmedial systems, digital and analogue, media-conscious strategies of narrative representation are changing. This change is significant to consider in an educational context where strategies of narrative representation are developed. Zipfel (2014) claims that a central perspective in this research field is to discuss the smallest common denominator of stories across media – a denominator that includes concepts of the non-real (fictional worlds), frames of make-believe and institutional practices. Focusing on transmedial worlds, Tosca and Klastrup (2020) discuss the use of stories in various media as transmedial world experiences. These experiences are multifaceted and multi-layered and thus require transmedial narrative strategies. Every story offers infinite possibilities to be expanded on, for example, prequels and sequels, cross-overs, as well as fan fiction and various merchandise. In addition, Jenkins (2006) claims that every medium adds a unique contribution by developing the story further. The re-creation of stories is not a new phenomenon, but the digitalisation of media has led to an increase in transmedia stories (Klastrup & Tosca, 2004). It is thus urgent to develop strategies for teaching narrative stories focusing on cross-media as well as transmedia storytelling.

In previous studies, the concept of a *text universe* has been used to describe creative re-creations of fictional stories, *re-presentations*, across and within media: "When (parts of) the same storyworld is

transferred to various text and media forms, the various re-presentations form a text universe" (Svensson & Lundström, 2019). In addition to text universe, the concepts of *remake* and *makeover* are used to describe two processes of the re-creation process (Svensson, 2013; Svensson & Lundström, 2019). On the one hand, a *remake* means that the story is made again, that is, a repetition of the story in a new and/or different fashion, such as a new medium. Hence, a remake is an adaptation that aims to be as close to the source text as possible (cf. Svensson, 2013; Svensson & Lundström, 2019). The process of remake can be seen as cross-media storytelling (Zazzera, 1995, cited in Giovagnoli, 2011, p. 24). A *makeover*, on the other hand, means that the story is made anew, that is an alteration of the story to fit a new audience. A makeover aims to alter the story as found in the source text which means that the story is expanded. As such, the makeover process can be seen as transmedia storytelling (Jenkins, 2007). Examples of makeovers are fan fiction and variation novels as well as prequels, sequels, or the retelling of a story from another character's perspective (cf. Svensson, 2013; Svensson & Lundström, 2019).

Previous studies on the use of a text universe in the classroom show that working with contrasts, for example, comparing a remake and a makeover, encourages comparative analysis (e.g. Svensson & Haglind, 2020). In the project of this study, a teaching design using the source text, a remake and a makeover has been applied in the upper secondary EFL classroom. The texts are Montgomery's *Anne of Green Gables* published in 1908 (source text); the limited TV series, *Anne of Green Gables* directed by Sullivan (1985) (remake); and the Netflix TV series, *Anne with an E*, written and produced by Walley-Beckett and directed by Wheeler (2017–2019) (makeover).[1] The present study focuses on a part of the project that compares Montgomery's (1908) *Anne of Green Gables* and Walley-Beckett's (2017–2019) *Anne with an E*.

3. Theoretical framework

As this study focuses on encouraging students' social, cultural, global, and critical awareness through transmedia storytelling, the theoretical framework combines Crenshaw's (1989) concept of *intersectionality* and Applebee's (1996) concepts of *knowledge-out-of-context* and *knowledge-in-action*. *Anne with an E* is relevant to this focus, as it re-claims a place in the literary tradition for groups of

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[1] Parts of this text universe, including *Anne with an E*, have been analysed in Lundström and Svensson, 2019.

people who have been marginalised or silenced in literary classics, for example, *Anne of Green Gables*, in the upper secondary EFL classroom.

Intersectionality, coined by Crenshaw (1989), opposes the single-axis framework and instead discusses how combined social and political aspects of identification are affected by systems of power, focusing on layers of marginalisation and discrimination as well as layers of privileged power positions. This article will use intersectionality as an analytical concept to emphasise various aspects of power positions that are discussed in the students' essays. According to de los Reyes and Mulinari (2005), intersectionality challenges hegemonic linguistic and cultural constructions by demonstrating how social identity is an intersection of, for example, gender, class and race. They use intersectionality as a theoretical perspective that forces people to question the acceptance of the social order of life, and they aim to problematise and make visible power structures that maintain inequality. Intersectionality connects power to the individual's ability to navigate and act as a subject within the framework of complex social structures, institutional practices and prevailing ideologies (Tefera et al., 2018). Hence, this perspective also includes a critical approach to traditions of knowledge:

> Intersectionality departs from a different epistemology where individuals, ideologies, accepted knowledge, discourses and material conditions are involved in a constant construction of power and subordination. Joining fractures, making links visible, deconstructing discourses and creating counter-images are part of an epistemological project that defamiliarizes the taken-for-granted and highlights people's actions and the scope of politics. (de los Reyes & Mulinari, 2005, p. 25, my translation)

By offering counter-images and defamiliarising what has been taken for granted, intersectional power dynamics have an epistemological significance that is highly relevant in an educational context. Gender, class, race, sexual orientation and so on must be contextualised in historically specific and spatially situated social processes (Harris & Leonardo, 2018). An intersectional perspective forces people to deconstruct discourses and visualise something other than a white, heterosexual, middle class man as the norm. As a result, those who are made invisible become visible (de los Reyes & Mulinari, 2005). In the present study, the teaching design focuses on making visible groups of people who previously have been invisible in the classic story. As such, intersectionality is used to analyse students' essays and the ensuing discussion of power re-distributions and the effects thereof.

Applebee's (1996) concepts of *knowledge-out-of-context* and *knowledge-in-action* relate to different aspects of meaning-making and what kinds of knowledge are considered important in a socially construed tradition. While knowledge-out-of-context can be seen to represent learning about the literary tradition, knowledge-in-action can be seen to represent learning through active participation in literary traditions. Knowledge-in-action is thus connected to the idea of traditions as dynamic, changing, and developing. Applebee (1996) claims that, through participation in traditions, "an individual is taking on a dynamic set of tools for being in and making sense of the world" (p. 20). Hence, in an educational context, it is important to provide opportunities for active participation in traditions:

> One of the most important features of a pedagogy designed to help students enter into culturally significant domains for conversation is that it invites genuine participation within the domain, the kind of participation that leads to knowledge-in-action rather than knowledge-out-of-context. (Applebee, 1996, p. 107)

The idea of inviting students to participate within the domain is central to the present study. The study focuses on the makeover of *Anne with an E*, which can be seen as including themes that are relevant to young people today, such as sexual orientation, LGBTQ issues, queer community, strong women, Indigenous populations, et cetera, to a greater extent than the source text, *Anne of Green Gables*.

4. Method

The research method applied in the project is design-based research (DBR), which aims to bridge the gap between research and practice in the formal education system. Therefore, DBR aims to develop and improve the practice by implementing educational research (Anderson & Shattuck, 2012). DBR shares epistemological, ontological and methodological traits with action research, but where action research primarily focuses on questions that arise in the practice, DBR is "conceived not just to meet local needs, but to advance a theoretical agenda, to uncover, explore, and confirm theoretical relationships" (Barab & Squire, 2004, p. 5).

In order to evaluate, inform and improve the teaching practice regarding social and cultural empowerment by using classic texts, their cultural and historical contexts, and various re-
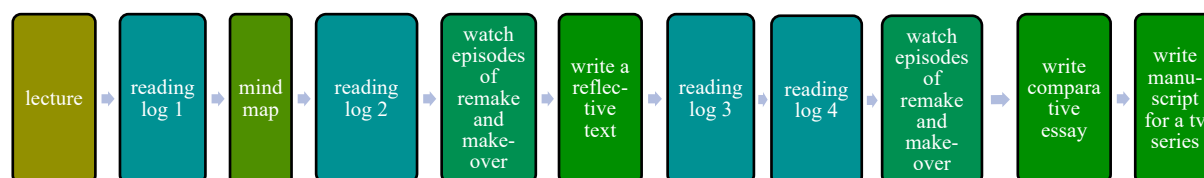
presentations, a research project was initiated with three upper secondary school teachers who teach English and Swedish. Carried out in the subject of English, the completed project's overarching aim is to create design principles based on the results of the three cycles of the project (cf. Anderson & Shattuck, 2012). Thus far, one cycle of the project has been completed.

In accordance with DBR (cf. Wang & Hannan, 2005), the project has been developed as a collaborative process by the researcher and the participating teachers. It addresses a learning objective identified as a challenge by research and practice alike, namely, to understand various layers of fictional texts, including what, why, and how older stories, or classics, are still relevant today. Moreover, it shows how a teaching unit that focuses on transmedia storytelling can empower students socially and encourage their social, cultural, global and critical awareness.

The project consists of a planning stage, an implementation stage, and a follow-up stage. Three teachers participated in the planning stage. One teacher had to leave the project during the planning stage but contributed with valuable input to the design; as a result, two remaining teachers participated during the implementation and follow-up stages. These two teachers work at an upper secondary school in central Sweden with approximately 1300 students, and they have 13 and 17 years of experience respectively teaching English and Swedish.

It was collectively decided that the project would be most suitable in English 6, as it addresses "themes, form and content in film and literature," as well as "societal issues, social, cultural, political, and historical conditions and values in different contexts and parts of the world where English is used, also in comparison to one's own experiences and knowledge" (Skolverket, 2021, my translation). The teachers decided to implement the teaching design in three classes during the second year of the aesthetics programme, specialising in arts, dance, and music, where Teacher 1 taught 32 students (Class A) and 27 students (Class B), and Teacher 2 taught 30 students (Class C). Given that the design was implemented as a part of the teachers' regular teaching practice, all students participated in the assignments. In accordance with the Swedish Research Council's ethical guidelines (2017), participation in the project was voluntary. While all students participated in the project, not all students participated in every stage of the design due to illness or absence for other reasons. The first cycle of the teaching design is described in Figure 1:

Figure 1

Teaching Design, Cycle 1

This design generated the following empirical data:

> 74 reading logs
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> 22 mind maps
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> 49 reflective texts
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> 89 comparative essays
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> 22 manuscripts for a TV series
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> 9 group interviews (58 students)
>
> 2 individual interviews (2 teachers)

Throughout the project, the reading logs function as a red thread for the students. Their logs were divided into four parts, as detailed in Figure 1: Part One consisted of Chapters 1–10, Part Two of Chapters 11–20, Part Three of Chapters 21–30 and Part Four of Chapters 31–38. The chapters were read during class and at home, and at the end of each part, the students answered questions, selected difficult words, summarised the chapters, et cetera. During the time in which the students read the novel, after parts 2 and 4, they watched selected episodes or parts of episodes in class.

Given that this article focuses on cultural dimensions and empowering education through literature, the empirical data consist of the students' comparative essays. These essays were written in response to instructions created by the teachers in which the students are asked to "write an analysis where you analyse the novel *Anne of Green Gables* (1908), partly in connection to the Netflix adaptation *Anne with an E* (2017–2019)". In the instructions, they were given six points (and one optional) to consider. These points focus on: 1) themes and motifs in the novel; 2) examples of changes in the makeover, why they have been made and how they affect the story; 3) how the themes and motifs from the novel have been developed or changed in the TV series; 4) identifying

new themes in the TV series; 5) how the TV series is adapted to a modern audience; and 6) why makeovers might reach a new and wider audience.

The empirical data consist of 89 comparative essays, which have been thematically analysed. Braun and Clarke (2006) explain that thematic analysis is a "method for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data" (p. 4), which makes it a suitable method to use when analysing the students' essays. "One of the benefits of thematic analysis is its flexibility", Braun and Clarke argue (p. 4). In their context, thematic analysis is not tied to any specific theoretical framework but can be used with a theory that is applicable to the study. A theme "captures something important about the data in relation to the research question, and represents some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 10). Hence, thematic analysis involves a number of choices that need to be considered and discussed.

The data have been analysed in accordance with the six-phase guide put forth by Braun and Clarke (2006). This guide consists of Phase 1: familiarising yourself with your data, which includes transcriptions; Phase 2: generating initial codes; Phase 3: searching for themes; Phase 4: reviewing themes; Phase 5: defining and naming themes; and Phase 6: producing the report (p. 16–24). Working through these phases, a bottom-up strategy was selected. The data have been read through several times with a focus on identifying themes in the students' essays. With the use of colour coding, the thematic analysis resulted in the following four themes: altered mood, altered characters, added characters, and the function and effect of transmedia storytelling. The empirical data consist of 89 student essays. While some of these essays are longer and contain more information, some are very short and do not contain a lot of information. Some of them bring up similar points and topics. In the Results section, quotes from the student essays are used as examples. In such a rich data material, it is neither possible nor fruitful to quote each student. Therefore, a student can be quoted more than once, while another student might not be quoted at all. The quotes are verbatim and have not been altered, which means that there might be grammatical errors present. The reason for not changing the students' writing is to tamper as little as possible with their texts.

The empirical data have been anonymised, are treated in accordance with the stipulations of the Swedish Research Council (2017), and will only be used for research purposes. In addition, the data have been stored in accordance with Jönköping University's storage and archival practice,

which follows the Swedish Data Protection Authority and The General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) (Lag 2018:218).

5. Results

The thematic analysis resulted in the identification of four themes that the students focused on in their essays: altered mood, altered characters, added characters, and the function and effect of transmedia storytelling.

5.1 Altered mood

In their comparative essays, several students explain that they see an altered mood in *Anne with an E*. One instance where this is noticeable is in the passages about Anne's life before arriving at Green Gables, as told through flashbacks: "In the reamake Mr. Hammonds dies while whipping/ abusing (misshandlar?) Anne. But in the book there are no signs of Anne being abused. Mr. Hammond did die in the book too though, but not under those circumstances" (A5).[2] Another incident that the students focus on where *Anne with an E* is more dramatic than the source text is when Anne is accused of stealing or losing Marilla's brooch: "in the book when Marilla blames Anne for losing the brooch, she is punished with curfew. But in the series they decide to send Anne back to the orphan asylum" (A5). Not only is the punishment more severe, but Matthew also acts differently:

> When Marilla realizes that it wasn't Anne's fault that the brooch was gone an occasion is added. Matthew takes the horse and chases the train she is on to go and get her back, which doesn't occur in the book. (A5)

In addition, Matthew behaves in a different way in *Anne with an E*, and the main character, Anne, is also portrayed differently:

> it is very clear that the person in charge wanted Anne to be radiating a charachter full of imaginations and big words. What I want to say is that they multiplied her personality. If she was special and unordinary in the novel, they made her even more so in the Netflix makeover. (C30)

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[2] All examples from the students' essays are quoted verbatim. They have neither been altered nor corrected, which means that errors in content or form might be present.

Hence, "some characters are 'out of character' in the series, compared to the book," A5 points out. Another student reflects on the effect of this altered mood as well as the added drama and exaggerated characteristics: "The original Anne of Green Gables is mostly a very happy and satisfying read, but the netflix makeover explores a lot more negative and traumatic feelings which gets the viewers to find a deeper connection to Anne" (C9). Several students point out the altered mood they found in *Anne with an E*, which is strengthened by the altered behaviour of some of the main characters. As a result, they find that the Netflix story is more dramatic than Montgomery's novel.

5.2 Altered characters

In addition to the altered, more dramatic mood and more dramatic and traumatic events in which Matthew and Anne behave in a different and exaggerated way, the students explain that *Anne with an E* provides other characters who are altered in the Netflix makeover. One character whom the students see as much altered is Miss Stacy, the Avonlea school teacher. Student C2 notices that

> The makeover have changed som of the characters too, for example, Miss Stacy. In the makeover she is messy in the classroom and the parents doesn't like or her ways of teaching. That didn't happen in the novel, no parent complained for how she teached. In the series she appear more freeminded and wild than in the novel.

Even though Miss Stacy is described by one student as "a woman that does things that's really out of the box" (A14), other students point out that these changes to Miss Stacy are not directly out of character:

> [t]he female teacher were already liberal in the story but I feel like they made her even more independant in Anne with an E, to show of a strong woman or to give Anne even a more clear role model to bring up another example. (A13)

A13 notices, while B17 explains, "Already in the novel Miss Stacy is a bit ahead of her time as a woman since she is the first female teacher in Avonlea and because she is very innovative" (B17). The students describe how the liberal characteristics of Montgomery's Miss Stacy are increased in the creation of the free-spirited Miss Stacy in *Anne with an E*.

In addition to a free spirit, Miss Stacy represents the modern woman, which several students reflect upon in their assignments: "In the Netflix serie the teatcher is 'modern' she is wearing pants, she

drives a motorbike and she is learing the students about new and modern things like how to light a lamp" (B10). Not only does she drive a motorbike, but another student points out that she can "fix her bicycle and her home by herself" (A14). Student B17 believes "that this change is made to make the story more modern and because today, the devoloped Miss Stacy is a more appropriate mentor for Anne than the original one." In addition, in the modern version, Miss Stacy is described as a character whom today's audiences can relate to:

> I think that they made these changes so that the story would be more relatable for the audience. Because the things that Miss Stacy does are like sneakpeaks of how both women and school are today. They have adapted the story to a modern audience. Because when you look at or read someting you want to be able to relate to it to make it more interesting. The original story is from 1908 so it's pretty fair that the reader doesn't relate that much to it. But in the Netlix version they have tried to make changes so that it will be easier to relate to the story. And I think that they have succeeded. (A14)

Anne with an E is clearly directed at the audience of today, which is illustrated by the enhancement of Miss Stacy's modern behaviour and actions, both of which are more adapted to how women behave and act today. The students point out that it is not only in terms of behaviour and actions that Miss Stacy is portrayed as a modern woman but also in her teaching methods: "her teaching method is different" (A14), and she "does science experiments" (B17). As a modern woman and a modern teacher, Miss Stacy can be seen as offering sneak peeks into "the future" as A14 suggests.

However, the way Miss Stacy teaches, dresses and behaves are factors that pose a threat to the conservative population of Avonlea. B17 points out,

> Miss Stacy has to face a lot of critisism and judgements, so I also think her character is changed to show, and in a way teache, todays women how women like her were approached at the time the story plays out. Both versions of the story about Anne talks about the theme gender inequalties, but I think it´s even more clear in the Netflix adaptation.

In the series, she is criticised by other female characters: "Her way of teaching is also intimidating to the other women in Avonlea" (A5). Progress in any way, shape or form has often been seen as a threat, and Miss Stacy is no exception. B17 notices that, by portraying her in this way, the series has an educational perspective where the audience is informed about gender inequalities.

Anne with an E has a strong feminist perspective, which some students point out. For example, one student writes that "Mrs Stacy Is also very different and shows more feminist qualities in the newer story" (C3), while another student elaborates on the same topic:

> Miss Stacy that I haven't really talkt about erlier gets a big role in the series and … [s]he is also very opendminded and more of a feminist then other women in her time. In the series I would add as themes culture and feminism. (B12)

Feminism is a theme throughout the series, which, the students explain, is not only portrayed through Miss Stacy but also through other characters as well: "In the series Anne tries to prove that a woman can do everything a man can do, in a society when the man stands in the centre" (C2). This strong feminist theme in the series could, C2 suggests, catch the audience's attention: "Another thing that can attract people to watch the makeover rather than reading the novel is the feminist perspective of the story." It is thus suggested that a contemporary audience would prefer the more feminist version of the story.

5.3 Added characters

While several characters in Montgomery's *Anne of Green Gables* have been altered in *Anne with an E*, there are also characters in the Netflix version that are not mentioned in the novel but have been added to the series. One example of a new character is Anne's friend from school, Cole, who, several students explain, is portrayed as different. One student notices that "Cole struggles a lot with being different and his story revolves around his sexuality, artistery and getting picked on" (C3). Another student explains that "Cole is also not a heterosexual which gives a wider span of different people. He is an artistic soul whom were bullied in school" (A13). Yet another student describes Cole as "the bullied, homosexual and creative kid. He refuse to go back to the avonlea school beacuase of the bullying" (C5). The two identification markers, homosexual and artist, are reasons why Cole feels different and why he is also the target of bullying at school, as the students state. C5 reflects upon the reason for portraying Cole in this way: "I think Cole has been added to give a bigger prespective of how being diffrent lead to bullying." This bigger picture can be seen in that it is not only Anne who is different or an outsider, as in Montgomery's novel, but also Cole, and this difference results in bullying.

Sexual orientation and the subsequent bullying of those who identify as gay or lesbian are themes that several of the students see as something that they, as part of a young audience of today, can identify with:

> A bit into the series, Cole talks to Anne about how he is different from others, and hints that he might be gay. That is a great example of how they took a more modern-day twist to the story, since being homosexual sis a topic that often gets talked about in today society. Having somebody in a series that is queer or a part of the LGBTQ community is a good way to get more viewers, because it creates a bigger opportunity for more people to relate to the story. If you relate to a character, you will probably watch the show and learn to love it. Even if it is bullying, homosexuality or anything else, it is always nice to feel like you can relate to something or someone, to feel less alone. (A7)

Another student also points out that bullying is a theme that young people can identify with: "Today more and more people are bullied through the interet and they need someone who they can relate to" (A6). According to the students, by adding a character who is young, gay and artistic, *Anne with an E* provides support to people who, for various reasons, have been bullied themselves. These themes, homosexuality and bullying, are not only themes that a young audience can *relate to*, but they are themes that young viewers can *identify with* and find support through.

Another example of a character who does not exist in Montgomery's novel but is added to *Anne with an E* is Sebastian (Bash), who Gilbert meets while working on a ship bound for Trinidad. Bash, who grew up in Trinidad, decides to follow Gilbert to Avonlea. Several students bring up Bash as a new character in the Netflix series. One student, for example, states, "There is also a knew charcter who is black, Bash who gets his story told" (A13). Besides including and providing narrative space to a Black character, which is different from *Anne of Green Gables*, another student explains that "Sebastians story focuses on how black people lived and could be treated in the years the story takes palce" (C3). In a similar way, another student explains, "Bash has had a hard life since he is black and the society wasn't very accepting of that at the time" (B8). In addition to providing space and a voice to an individual Black character, the Black community in Charlottetown is represented: "the bog which was a dirty place where black people could find work to do that the white people didn't want to" (B8). Pondering the addition to the story, these

students explain that it provides a piece of history that is not present in the source text. Student A13 reflects on this representation of history:

> This character has been added to the story firstly, to make it more historically accurate since this is how almost all black people lived at a time when the story was written and secondly to reach a wider audience and make more people feel included. (A13)

Even though not all Black people lived in this way, the students see that the added characters contribute to a more realistic representation of history.

A third example of a character who has been added to *Anne with an E* and is not part of *Anne of Green Gables* is Ka'kwet. *Anne with an E* also includes her family and their community, which some students point out. One student explains, "They where native americans with a diffrent culture then Anne and her friends and most of them found them odd and a little scary just because it was something new to them" (A26). Several students describe the fear the other characters express when they come into contact with the native population: "when one boy go hurt in the woods and the native americans came and helped them, some of children got very scared and one girl even fainted when she saw them," A27 describes. Another student explains:

> when Annes class where out in the woods walking, someone saw a girl that was a native american and the class starts to scream. I think this is in the series because it is something that we talk about a lot in todays society. (A26)

The fear of the unfamiliar is a topic that the students focus on in their essays, and they connect this to discussions in society about the unfamiliar in general or the native population in Canada in particular.

In addition to being afraid of the native population, some of the other characters also treat them badly, which several students describe. One student explains, "Ka´kwet is a native Canadian and as many know, they have not been treated well and children were sent to schools where they tried to erase their culture" (C3). Describing the mistreatment of the native population, C3 focuses in particular on the abuse of Canadian children in residential schools and makes the connection between how the native population is portrayed in the series and how they have been treated in real life. Another student also makes this connection:

in the Netflix version they want to show us how the Native Americans have been treated badly by some and how they are important for history, I think that is more important for us today than it might have been then. (A11)

When describing the addition of Ka'kwet and her family, the students see that it is an important addition: "Even if it was not in the book, it can be important to show how the native Americans was treated at this time" (A27). The addition of the Indigenous population in *Anne with an E* encourages a discussion of why they were not present in *Anne of Green Gables*. One student elaborates,

> In the era when Anne of Green Gables were written the indigenous peolpe was someting you didn´t want to talk about. They had the lowest position in the society, and somthing you never would had mentiond in a book. Yet now adays there´s not ad bad sight on the indigenous people, even if it´s not good yet, it isn´t as abad as it was atleast. Therfor I think they added tem into Anne with an E. To show what people on the time when Anne of Green Gables was written, was thinking about them, but they wanted to show that there´s nothing wrong with them, and that they acually as good as we, and can do as good things as we. (B11)

Student B11 reflects on the abuse of Indigenous people and the low status given to them by the colonisers. A similar reflection is provided by another student:

> For a similar reason they added Ka'kwet, a girl from a native village on the island. At this time, the canadians and americans were trying to chase away the natives from the land that had been theirs and discriminated them and called them savages. Since this was a big part of history, the story would be more accurate if they adressed this problem and gave it a place in the story. (B8)

In particular, the theme of racism that is brought to the story through these added characters is further connected to similar acts in contemporary society:

> Rasism is a bigger theme in the Netflix makover and it reaches a bigger audience in todays society. The protest against police brutality and the fight against rasism is bigger today than ever before. Therefor, characters like Ka'kwet makes more people intrested in the story. (A6)

In addition to giving space and voice to the Indigenous people, the students see that an effect of adding Ka'kwet and her family is that *Anne with an E* portrays a more accurate historical representation of Canada's past.

The addition of the three characters of Cole, Bash and Ka'kwet in *Anne with an E* strengthens the theme of the outsider that can be found in *Anne of Green Gables*. One student explains,

> That means the outsider motiv is heavliy focused on her, while in the netflix adaptation includes more characters. An exampel of such character is Cole, a bulied feminin boy. The second character is Bash, a poor boy of color, and at last Ka'kwet, a girl of color. These characters has the same experieces as Anne, non-socialaceppted characters the struggels with rejection. (C1)

While Anne is the only character in *Anne of Green Gables* who is portrayed as an outsider, the added characters in *Anne with an E* are also portrayed as outsiders, which C2 notices: "But in the makeover Anne isn't the only outsider. All three new caracters can also bee seen as outsiders as the don't fit in." Similarly, C3 admits, "I think this was interesting because we see new storylines told from other perspectives and other 'outsiders'." While Anne is presented as an outsider in *Anne of Green Gables* – not only because she is new in Avonlea but also because she behaves differently than the other children – the added characters in *Anne with an E* are also portrayed as outsiders who fall outside of "the norm."

By adding characters who expand or transgress the idea of "the norm," *Anne with an E* highlights themes of diversity and inclusion. One student points out that "[t]here are characters that are added in the serie, for example, Cloe, Bash and Ka'kwet. These characters bring more diversity and the series feel more inclusive" (C2). Given that there are now more diverse characters, C2 experiences the series as more inclusive than Montgomery's novel. This theme of diversity could be a sign of the times in which the series was created, which one student explains further:

> Today we talk a lot about diversity and that we become a better society by letting everyone be in it. But that has not always been the case and a lot of people have been discriminated because of their etnicity and more, for a very long time and we can still find it in our society. (A13)

In this example, the student considers how the series' diverse characters reflect a society in which people are better at accepting those who are different. Hence, the series appeals, the students explain, to a more tolerant audience.

The inclusion of more diverse characters in *Anne with an E* demonstrates an increase in representation of strong and powerful women, gay and lesbian characters, the queer community, people of colour and the Indigenous population of Canada. Hence, the diversity results in a wider representation of people. In relation to the presence of diversity in the makeover, some students reflect upon the absence of diversity in the source text. One student, for example, explains,

> The characters were white, living in fancy houses, wearing stylish clothes, were straight and had food on their tables, things that were considerd as normal back then. But did the society actually look that way? In the Netflix adaption from 2017 were characters added to represent other sexualities than straight, they also represented people with coloured skin and people with different cultures. These changes was probobly made to involve a wider and much more modern audience and to make the story a bit more realistic compared to the original novel. (A15)

This reflection on the added diversity and the speculation on the reasons for it illustrate how the student makes the connection between the increased diversity and the expectations of the contemporary audience. The student also suggests that it might be a strategy to reach a wider audience.

In a similar way, two other students also describe the increased diversity as a more realistic representation, and thus worth including. One student remarks, "These changes has been made because they were there during the time Anne's story is told but they were left out and are worth being included in the story" (C23). Another student shares this view:

> It doesn't only focus on the good and sweet of the world. It's focusing on bullying, showing how the teacher of Avonlea is treated by the other women for not wearing a dress and corsette. How much lack of respect, the white people have towards the Native Americans. In other words, the very conservative side of the people of Avonlea is shown in the Netflix makeover, which I don't mind. It makes the story a bit more believable. (B19)

This student experiences the more historically accurate representation, including the representation of the majority population as conservative, as more believable, while another student discusses this topic, but in a more general way: "Over all I think makeovers reach a bigger audince because they include things that is missining in the story, and that´s most of the time the

reason why makovers get made" (B11). A common denominator in these essays is that the students see that the creators of *Anne with an E* have created a more diverse version of the story.

5.4 The function and effect of transmedia storytelling

Anne with an E is transmediated from novel to TV series, which is a medium that the students in the study are familiar with. Some students focus on the effect of telling the story in a film medium where images of the story are provided. One student explains the different processes that take place when the story is experienced in a different medium:

> When we read a novel we create our own picture of what the enviroment looks like, what the characters look like, and what happens next in the story. We create thousands of imagies in our head, wich often is the writers intension. Even though there are explanations of what everything looks like we can all imagine it differently. In shows or movies these things are already written out. We can not imagine how the people or the enviroment looks like since we can see it on the screen. Changes has to be made to fill in for our imagination. (A11)

In a similar way, another student describes the difference between telling a story through the book and the film media, and the effects thereof:

> The Netflix makeover has added characters, to what I think, fill out the story even more and make it more interesting to watch. A novel and a film or a series is different in the way that it tells a story. A book or a novel is very describing and explains the feelings and thoughts of the characters way more than a film or series does. In the novel about Anne, you get a situation with characters and also their thoughts and part of the story while you don´t really get that in the series. You get facial expressions and signs of emotions, but not always an explanation on why or how those feelings accured or what they really feel like. So when you take that part in the novel away, it leaves enough room for another character to take place in the story, so I understand why it was added. (A7)

Both these students describe the difference in experiencing a story told through the film medium and the book medium, and they connect how the audience does not need to activate their imagination to the same extent when watching the TV series as when reading the novel. Therefore, they see the addition of new characters and new themes as another way to challenge the audience's imagination.

It is not always a positive experience to watch the story instead of or after reading it. One student explains that the way the story is portrayed in *Anne with an E* clashes with their expectations of it:

> Oddly enough though the biggest difference i saw was how fifferent everything looked from how how I imagined it. … Maybe that is just the way it is when you transision from a book to a film, but it ruined the experienc for me a little. (B22)

This clash with expectations created a negative reaction. While one student states: "I believe in general however that the original is always better than the makeover or remake" (C20), another student explains,

> I don't like to many changes in the original books. I think it is important to keep the old stories and book so we don't forget them. You learn a lot about the past, how they lived, how they were thinking and their everyday lives from the original stories. (C14)

Another student reflects in more detail on the negative aspects of being provided with images rather than constructing them on your own. They claim that watching the TV series results in "deleting the thought progress of the casual reader, leading us to to become a viewer instead," and continues, "You can only get this feeling from the novel. Because in the Netflix adaptation, you get a forced picture of what everyone looks like plus their surroundings" (C20). Hence, there is an expressed wish to create their own pictures of what the characters and their surroundings look like rather than being forced to experience someone else's interpretation of the story.

However, some students point out that it can be positive to experience the story through the film medium if you struggle with reading or do not want to read. Student B3, for example, sees that "The Netflix adaptation is a way for people who have reading difficulties, or just prefer cinematicexperiences over litterature, to enjoy the world of Anne without having to read the novel." Another student explains, "It is easier to see in the series than it is in the book" (A3). Likewise, B7 adds,

> The Netflix version is more adapted to a modern audience because not a lot of younger people read a lot and likes to watch instead so a show is more suitable for the society we live in right now. You get a clearer vision of everything when you see it and it is also easier to concentrate for many people when they are watching something than if they are reading.

B7 claims that it is the young audience in particular that prefers watching the story to reading it but sees the advantages of the film medium, as it provides images and a clearer vision, both of which are helpful to those who find it hard to concentrate for longer periods of time. Another student connects the activity of watching the story to the TV series' popularity:

> In this perticular case the makeover of the series has got a bigger audience then the novel I think that is because people of today has gone more lazy and think reading a book is way more work then they need and a series is a very good way to relax. That's why people have seen the series and not the read the book. (B12)

In these statements, it is clear that it is the film medium rather than the expanded story that is attractive to the young audience. While one student describes young people as preferring the film medium over the book medium: "Netflix is something that's often used today, while books aren't as loved by many younger people" (A2), another student describes the same situation but also sees that it is possible for the audience to find Montgomery's *Anne of Green Gables* through the TV series, *Anne with an E*:

> I belive that a netlix show has a higher chance of reaching a wider audience today because of the amount of people that are choosing their phone/TV/ computer over books, especially young kids and teenagers. This can also bring people to read more books, because poelpe are sometimes choosing a book based on what serie or movie they whatched or the opposite. (A17)

Hence, while a couple of students point out negative aspects of watching a makeover, several students point out certain positive aspects, such as providing a clearer understanding, facilitating for students who struggle with reading, and attracting a contemporary and wider audience.

It is not only the film medium that attracts a contemporary audience but also themes and characters that are more relevant to the young audience of today. Student C3 reflects on the additions in the makeover:

> I think these changes and adds were written in the story because of newer and younger audiences being more interested in a more "up to date" adaptation where the story focuses not just on the good parts of history but also the bad and just as real parts. I think it was important for the makers of Anne with an E to involve stories that have been hidden and show the reality of life for different types of people.

The updated additions focus on the positive as well as negative aspects of the altered or added historical perspectives, as well as the fact that the makeover introduces stories from characters representing people who have not been given a voice or space in the source text. Therefore, these additions are seen as an adaptation to the society of 2017: "The world changes. There is some charm in reading about how the society looked a long time ago but it has to keep up with the modern at least a little bit in order to catch the audiences attention" (A13). Another student sees these updated additions as the reason why the TV series attracts the attention of a young audience today:

> I know a lot of people and a lot of my friends that has watched the show but not read the book. And I think that one of the resons of that is because it´s updated and because it has something that makes us relate. (A12)

In particular, it is the diversity and modern perspectives that make the story interesting to a young audience. C2 claims, "Makeovers can be a good thing, especially if the add new divers characters and more modern perspectives of the story. That makes it feel more up to date, even if the original work is really old." Student C3's ideas are of a similar kind: "I think makeovers are a great way of making a story new and fresh for younger audiences. It doesn´t remove the original story but instead takes it apart to make something different and creative out of it" (C3). The progressive characters and ideas put forth in the makeover are, the students claim, relevant to a younger audience. At the same time, they make visible the absence of themes such as diversity and inclusion in the source text. Hence, the makeover provides critical aspects of the source text, which the students point out.

Several students discuss how the makeover highlights issues that are relevant to a 2017 audience from a critical perspective. For example, A12 claims that *Anne with an E* "is very politicaly correct," and continues, "I feel like the Native Americans were forgotten in the film/book industry in the 1900´s." Concerning the character Cole, the same student reflects,

> I feel like Cole also makes the story more updated, he´s bullied and makes art, read books and doesn´t care about school. If his character had been in the old version I feel like it would have been a girl instead. Because in that time as a boy you should be strong and fearless, not afraid and

small. And the fact that they have someone that kind of suffers from mental illness is very brave and speaks to a lot of people in our age. (A12)

The Netflix series is not only more up to date but also easier to relate to, according to several students. Student B17, for example, explains that the "developed feministic character of Miss Stacy makes the story more relatable to women in todays society" and that "[r]asicm is something that we still have in todays society so many people can relate to it." Because the story can be timeless and modern, B17 continues, "more people can relate and be touched by it." However, A6 points out a risk with makeovers:

The only problem with a makover is that important themes can be lost. Even if it's easier to watch something more relateble we are at the risk of losing a part of history. Therefor Anne with an 'E' can be somewhat missleading from a historical perspective. (A6)

It is not clear which theme or part of history that is lost in *Anne with an E*, but the statement could refer to those who only watch the TV series and thus may have a misconstrued idea of the novel if they assume that the TV series is a remake and not the makeover it is. Another interpretation of this statement is that the more up-to-date version, with themes such as sexual orientation and the mistreatment of the native population, may give the impression that these were accepted in society at large. By not including them, *Anne of Green Gables* may be seen as providing a more accurate picture of the society in which the novel is set, and *Anne with an E* can be misleading from a historical perspective. While most students see *Anne with an E* as a more realistic representation of the time and place in which the story is set, this particular student may argue that the same is true for *Anne of Green Gables*.

6. Discussion and conclusion

In response to the three challenges identified by educational research and the educational practice to 1) educate democratic citizens and prepare for life in a global and digital world; 2) utilise the opportunities for varied learning provided by today's screen culture; and 3) respond to the new demands placed on students as readers, or more specifically, the challenge to understand fictional stories on various levels, a teaching design was created with three upper secondary school teachers in the subject of English. The design focuses on including transmedia storytelling that re-claims a place in the literary tradition for groups of people who have been marginalised or silenced in literary classics in the upper secondary EFL classroom. Hence, the aim of this article was to analyse

essays where upper secondary school students compare *Anne of Green Gables* to *Anne with an E* in order to discuss how transmedia storytelling can function as social and cultural empowerment and encourage global and critical awareness.

Returning to the research questions concerning which aspects the students discuss in their comparative essays and which effects they see as a result of the process of transmedia storytelling, it is clear that the aspects they focus on are connected to intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989; de los Reyes & Mulinari, 2005), and the effects they describe can be connected to knowledge-in-action (Applebee, 1996).

The analysis shows that in their comparative essays, the students focus on systems of power that illuminate layers of marginalisation and discrimination in relation to privileged power positions (cf. Crenshaw, 1989). Three such systems of power are gender, sexual orientation and race/ethnicity. Regarding gender-related themes, the students describe the representation of modern female characters in *Anne with an E*, as exemplified by Miss Stacy, who, the students point out, is portrayed with characteristics that traditionally have been associated with masculinity, such as wearing pants, and driving and fixing a motorbike. The students also mention Cole, who is described as artistic and soft, which leads one student to claim that if this character would have existed in the novel, he would probably have been written as a girl. Cole and Aunt Josephine are two of the main characters who are portrayed as gay and lesbian, and the queer community in Charlottetown is described as vibrant and strong. In addition to gender and sexual orientation, the students' essays focus on race/ethnicity – another dominant system of power that is highlighted in *Anne with an E* through the characters of Bash and Ka'kwet. The students describe how the inclusion of Bash reflects not only the Black community in Charlottetown but also how difficult it was for the conservative population in Avonlea to accept a person of colour moving in and living among them. Through Ka'kwet and her family, the audience are informed about the customs and traditions as well as of the mistreatment of the Indigenous people in Canada. By including these dominant systems of power, the makeover provides counter-images that can be seen as part of an epistemological project that defamiliarizes what has been taken for granted (cf. de los Reyes & Mulinari, 2005).

Through the inclusion of these characters and aspects, the students see that new themes are included, for example, bullying and racism, as well as diversity and inclusion. The students explain that by including several characters portrayed as different, it signals that it is okay to be different, which is the prevailing theme. The makeover emphasises intersectionality and forces the audience to question the accepted social order of life (cf. de los Reyes & Mulinari, 2005). Hence, a comparison between *Anne of Green Gables* and *Anne with an E* encourages a norm-critical perspective.

The students point out that a TV series is a medium that a young audience of today is familiar with. As a result, they relate to the makeover more than to the source text. In addition, new themes such as sexual orientation, bullying, racism, diversity and inclusion target a younger audience and contribute to making the story more relevant to them. Hence, the teaching design facilitates students to create knowledge-in-action through active participation in the literary tradition (cf. Applebee, 1996) by including the makeover. Knowledge-in-action is connected to the idea of traditions as dynamic, changing and developing. One way in which this idea is noticeable in the students' essays is when they describe *Anne with an E* as more historically accurate. While they explain that the time in which *Anne of Green Gables* is set is different from today, they nevertheless point out that, for example, boys with artistic interests, gay people, Black people and the Indigenous population all existed in Canada at the time but were left out of the novel. This shows that the students apply a critical perspective on the source text.

The teaching design applied in the project provides examples that re-claim a place in the literary tradition for groups of people who have been marginalised or silenced in literary classics. In this way, those who are made invisible become visible (de los Reyes & Mulinari, 2005). By comparing the source text to the makeover, the students notice that the altered and added elements in *Anne with an E* shed light on missing aspects in *Anne of Green Gables*. Hence, they question the historical accuracy of the source text and the social order of life. They also question the historical accuracy of the makeover. For example, one student claimed that *Anne with an E* can be misleading from a historical perspective because it may provide an inaccurate image of, for example, homosexuality and the native population being accepted and discussed in the society at the time when the story is set. Through both these critical perspectives, the students demonstrate critical awareness. The counter-images that highlight dominant systems of power and defamiliarise taken-for-granted social and cultural hierarchical structures can be seen as an epistemological project, de los Reyes

and Mulinari (2005) claim. Through complex and intersectional social structures, institutional practices, and prevailing ideologies (Tefera et al., 2018), the inclusion of transmedia storytelling functions as social and cultural empowerment and encourages global and critical awareness. Borsgård (2021) points out that teachers are positive towards teaching literature as a means of democratic socialisation. One way of conveying respect for human rights and for people's differences, as well as equality between women and men and solidarity between people (SKOLFS 2011:144), could be through empowering literature education – literature education that encourages social and cultural empowerment and prepares students for life in a global and digital world where a critical perspective is crucial.

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