

## **“New technologies” and “old values”: The function of various text and media forms in literary studies**

*Anette Svensson*

In a society where multimodal stories (movies, TV series, and computer games) have a big influence on young people, reports show that young people demonstrate a decrease in reading habits, reading comprehension, and reading abilities. This article analyses to what extent and in what way(s) various text and media forms are used in literary studies at upper secondary level in Sweden through interviews with five teachers, who offer their experiences, ideas, and thoughts on working with various fictional texts. The results show that novels are used most frequently, that the teachers struggle with the decrease in reading habits among their students, that the students prefer and show great knowledge about films, that there is an absence of multimodal fictional texts in literary studies, and that the teachers see that neither text form nor media form has an impact on student performance.

**Keywords:** fiction, literary studies, literary value, multimodality, reading competence

Anette Svensson, senior lecturer, Högskolan i Jönköping  
*anette.svensson@hlk.hj.se*

## ***Introduction***

In a multimodal media society, stories told through various forms such as movies, TV series, computer games, and console games have a big influence on young people who are mass consumers of these texts (Medierådet, 2008). Multimodality is defined as “incorporating or utilizing several different methods or systems” (Multimodality, n.d.). Hence, multimodal texts—that is, texts that communicate their message using more than one semiotic mode or channel of communication—though not a new phenomenon, are spreading rapidly world-wide due to recent changes in the media environment. At the same time, demands for new competences, such as the ability to transform semiotic systems and languages, are required from readers, writers, players, etc. New media forms are thoroughly altering the conditions for communication (Fairclough, 1995; Kress, 2003). These alterations, one may assume, might also be true for fictional texts—that is, texts that contain stories that are not real—and are significant for the way people interpret their surroundings and make their lives meaningful (Bruner, 2002).

Two recent reports, focusing on knowledge development and the status of reading in Sweden, point to the decrease in reading habits among Swedish youth, particularly young boys (Skolverket, 2013; SOU, 2012). With this information in mind, it is highly significant to study which fictional texts are used in “literary studies”—that is, the part of language subjects (Swedish, in this context) that focuses on the teaching and learning of fictional texts—at upper secondary level. Current research shows that Swedish youth spend much of their recreational time using (reading, playing, watching, etc.) fictional texts (e.g., Svensson, 2014). This result also makes it relevant to focus on the use of fictional texts in literary studies, not only to see what text forms (genre, in this article used for printed fictional texts) and what media forms (mode) are used in a school context, but also to further explore the purpose of using them and the ability of the participating teachers to see if they affect student performance or not. Although the present study focuses on a Swedish context, the results might be useful for literary studies in language subjects around the world.

## ***Aim and research questions***

This article analyses and discusses to what extent and in what way(s) various text and media forms, particularly multimodal fictional texts, are used in literary studies at upper secondary level. The following research questions have been a guiding principle throughout the study:

- What fictional texts do the participating teachers use when teaching literature, and what are their functions?

- What media forms do the participating teachers use when teaching literature, and what are their functions?
- What is the effect(s) of the selected fictional text and/or media form on student performance as experienced by the participating teachers?

## **Method**

The present study was conducted during the spring of 2012 using the method of qualitative interviews in order to examine not only the teachers' use of various text and media forms in literary studies at upper secondary level but also their reasons for selecting various text and media forms to work with, their experiences of working with them, and their reflections on the function of these texts in the classroom and the effect of using them. Qualitative studies focus on finding an understanding of how certain things are experienced. Rather than explaining how things are, these studies aim to reach a deeper understanding of the investigated phenomenon (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Because the aim of this study was to analyse to what extent and in what ways various text and media forms are used in literary studies and particularly focus on teachers' opinions and experiences with regards to the use of fictional texts in an educational contexts, interviews with practicing teachers was regarded the most appropriate method with which to gather the required information. Due to their "unique flexibility" (Galleta, 2013, p. 2), semi-structured interviews were selected not only for the ability to follow up on the participants' answers (Galleta, 2013) but also for their ability to address the exploratory dimensions of the research questions used in this study.

## **Participants**

The five participating teachers in this study work at two upper secondary schools in northern Sweden (which is a convenience sample), where they teach the subject Swedish combined with another subject that is of less interest to this study. In order to preserve their anonymity, they have, in this article, been given as aliases letters A–E. Teacher A is one year from retirement and has been working as a teacher since the end of the 60s and teaches the subjects Swedish and English. Teacher B has been teaching Swedish and Religion since 1982, and teacher C has been teaching Swedish and English since 1983. The two teachers with the least experience of the five participants have been working as teachers since 1999. Teacher D teaches Swedish and English, and teacher E teaches Swedish and Religion. Hence, the participants are all highly experienced teachers with at least 12 years of experience of working as teachers. This experience means that the participants could not only offer their views and ideas on the current situation but could also offer a perspective of and were able to see trends during their time as

teachers. All five teachers are aged 40 and older, which means that they are not themselves part of a generation that grew up as “digital natives,” though there are few teachers today that are. The gender division of the participants with one male and four female teachers is representative of the gender division at the work places, since there are more women teaching Swedish at upper secondary level. However, neither age nor gender is a focal point of this study.

### ***Instruments and Procedure***

Before the interviews took place, an email was sent out to the teachers who participated together with their students in a previous study focusing on the media habits of Swedish youth (Svensson, 2014).<sup>1</sup> Five teachers responded in a positive way and volunteered to participate in the study. The participants were informed that their participation was voluntary in accordance with VR's ethical principles. Each semi-structured interview took place at the teachers' work places and lasted between 30–55 minutes. The participants were not given any questions in advance, but they were aware of the fact that the study would concern various media forms in some way since they were familiar with the previous study. The interviews, conducted in Swedish, were recorded on one primary and one secondary audio recording device with the consent of the participants.

### ***Coding and Analysis***

The documented material has been transformed in several steps. The spoken interviews were first recorded and then transcribed into written text using the transcription programme Clan. It is impossible to clearly separate the analysis process from the coding process in this study since they were performed by the same person. Even if it was not the initial aim, part of the analysis began when the interviews were transcribed. The analysis process was also a part of the selection process that took place after the transcription was completed. From the complete transcribed material, the parts of the interviews that concerned the study's research questions were selected and sorted by theme correlating to each question without losing the context in which the quote was initially stated. As a result, the material has been transformed into a document with quotes sorted by category rather than by participant. The quotes have been translated into English to fit this article, and great care has been taken to maintain their spoken form. Hence, adherence to the source statements has been a high priority. The analysis process has also been present while re-organising the material into a workable document; this docu-

---

<sup>1</sup> For further information about the selection process for the previous study, please, see Svensson, 2014.

ment was analysed once more as a new selection process took place, namely, to decide which statements should be quoted directly and which should be referred to indirectly while simultaneously keeping the research questions in mind and still making sure that the statements were not moved out of their context in such a way that the meaning shifted.

### **Background**

The present study combines literary studies with the teaching and learning of literature. As such, it concerns as diverse areas as the media habits of Swedish youth, past and present steering documents for upper secondary level language education in Sweden, previous research concerning teaching with multimodal texts, the general status of reading and fictional texts in Sweden, and the specific value that is ascribed literary studies in general and reading and writing fictional texts in particular.

### ***The media habits of Swedish youth***

The media habits of young people in Sweden have been the focal point of several studies conducted by the Swedish Media Council (e.g., Graffman & Fredriksson, 2010; Linderöth & Olsson, 2010). Media habits are also prominent in other studies where either content (Olin-Scheller, 2008) or medium (Alexandersson & Hansson, 2011) is in focus. While Olin-Scheller's (2008) study shows that the participants value the story higher than the medium that is used to tell the story, Graffman and Fredriksson's (2010) study shows that the participants value the medium higher than the content. The difference between these two studies is that Olin-Scheller focuses on stories while Graffman and Fredriksson focus on reality shows—a difference that may have an effect on the participants' evaluation of form and content.

In a study focusing on how much time Swedish youth spend on fictional texts containing stories in a school and a recreational context, the results show that the participants spend much time consuming fictional texts as a recreational activity using various media forms such as music, film, TV series, blogs/twitter/diaries, and computer games/console games. In a school context, however, they experience fictional texts primarily using the media forms of printed text, music, and film (Svensson, 2014). At the same time as young people tend to dissolve the boundaries between various media forms (Olin-Scheller, 2008), as well as the boundaries between consuming and producing texts (Toffler, 1992),<sup>2</sup> the school system seems to maintain traditional structures, traditional media forms, and a traditional view on reading. The discrepancy between the school and recreational contexts underlies this project, even though the main focus in this study is on a school context as it

---

<sup>2</sup> For further information about the development of Toffler's concept prosumption, see Kotler (1986) 510-513.

investigates which text and media forms five teachers use in literary studies, as well as explores their ideas, thoughts, and reasons for using the selected text and media forms.

### ***The steering documents and the widened text concept***

In the steering documents for upper secondary schools in Sweden, Lpf 94 (Skolverket, 1994), “the wider text concept” was introduced as a way to expand the established category of printed texts to include other visual, audial, audio-visual, and multimodal texts. At upper secondary level, the wider text concept is a highly significant part of teaching languages, in particular Swedish and English (Skolverket, n.d.a).<sup>3</sup> In the year 2000, the widened aspect of text was further emphasised in all school subjects in order for the Swedish educational system to follow the developments in the surrounding society where the students met with texts in various media forms to a great extent (Skolverket, n.d.a).

In the most recent steering documents for upper secondary school, Gy11 (Skolverket, 2011), the wider text concept is replaced with the word “text” in relation to the subject Swedish. It is not specified what it refers to, but it appears to be narrower and no longer include multimodal texts. It is stated that students should “use fictional and non-fictional texts of various kinds as well as film and other media forms as sources for self-perception and for perception of other peoples’ experiences, conditions, thoughts and imaginary worlds” (Skolverket, 2011, p. 160, my translation). Hence, though the concept “text” is narrow, it is clear that students should encounter not only printed texts and films but also other media forms in the subject Swedish, though not necessarily in connection with the teaching and learning of literature.

More specifically connected to the teaching and learning of literature, it is stated in Gy11 that it should contain “central motifs, narrative technique and regular stylistic features in fictional stories, for example, in fictional texts and theatre as well as in film and other media” (Skolverket, 2011, p. 162, my translation). It is clearly stated that students should encounter fictional text in various media forms, thus referring to the wider text concept without using that explicit term. It is not specified what “other media” refers to, but it is clear that it is something other than printed texts, film, and theatre performances. In this article, the wider aspect of text is used to cover various kinds of literary productions, such as novels, computer games, and songs. However, when referring to text form, printed texts are in focus, while media

---

<sup>3</sup> The study was conducted at a time when Lpf 94 was the prevailing steering document. However, since there were only a couple of months left of the semester before the new curriculum, Gy11, was introduced, the teachers had started planning for their work with it, but Lpf 94 was still in practice.

form focuses on other means of distribution (that is, those texts that are not printed).

### ***Teaching with multimodal texts***

Although digital technology and certain media forms, particularly mass media and social media, are strongly contributing to the wide spread of multimodal texts, multimodality is not a new feature (Siegel, 2006). Siegel (2006) argues that "[d]espite the claim that multimodality is new on the literacy scene, children have always engaged in what are now called multimodal literacy practices" (p. 65). This knowledge and experience of multimodality has been proven helpful in educational contexts. Referring to "The semiotic turn in language arts education," Siegel states that not only do "children come to school with well-stocked semiotic toolkits that, when tapped, positioned them as meaning makers," but she also explains that this knowledge is decisive for students who failed to display the level of linguistic competence that was required for a successful participation in the education (p. 69). In these cases, she claims, "treating drawings, dramatic plays, and 3-D constructions as evidence of literacy led to multimodal transformations in their identities as literate people" (p. 69). Although not focusing on fictional texts, these advantages could possibly be applicable to literary studies.

In research focusing on literary studies, it is clear that the reading of traditional literature has been the basis for how fictional texts in digital media, TV series, and film are used and understood (Elmfeldt & Erixon, 2007). However, there is a tendency towards cross-fertilization between the traditional field of comparative literature and the expanding field of media studies. This cross-fertilization shows that young people's experiences of using multimodal texts affect their approach to reading traditional (printed) fictional texts (Elmfeldt & Erixon, 2007).

Several researchers focus on the effect that young people's use of digital media in a recreational context has on their language competence with a particular focus on English (e.g., Levy, 1997; Svensson, 2008; Sundqvist, 2009; Vigmo, 2010). The question Vigmo (2010) asks is how teachers are expected to work in a changed language situation, where the students' recreational activities strongly affect their language competence and thus contribute further to a highly heterogeneous classroom. Though Vigmo's study relates particularly to the English language, the questions raised are relevant to the present study in terms of how teachers work with the changed literary situation where the use of multimodal texts in a recreational context affects the students' general literary competence.

### ***The value and status of reading***

“Why should we read fictional texts?” Magnus Persson (2007, p. 6, my translation) asks, and in an attempt to answer this question from a historic perspective, he gives the reasons for morale as well as for language competence (2007, p. 6). However, not only the texts themselves but also the ways through which people read change over time, which is particularly significant in a time when there are intense cultural and media-technological changes in the surrounding society (Persson, 2007, p. 6). The value of studying literature is neither questioned nor debated within the field of comparative literature (Persson, 2012, p. 24). Instead, old values, or myths, about literature as having positive values are still prevailing in this particular context (Persson, 2012, p. 8). In contemporary society and in the general educational context in Sweden, the value of studying literature is under heavy debate at the same time as reading fictional texts is decreasing and sometimes threatened by other forms of reading, for example, reading from a screen or listening to an audio book (Person, 2012, p. 7).

When it comes to the function of printed fictional texts in general, Palm (2009, p. 281) claims that there is a specific value that comes from the production and consumption of fictional texts. Storytelling is an aesthetic form of art that appeals to both reason and emotion. Aesthetic value can, of course, appear in numerous nuances and can therefore not be fixed (Palm, 2009, p. 283). In this form of art, there is “a complex, highly combined force, or energy, referred to as ‘literarity’” (2009, p. 291, my translation). This energy has a specific value that is often associated with reading printed fictional texts, predominantly novels. “Reading is a value-making activity,” Palm claims (2009, p. 283), and a person’s ability to create value of a fictional text is based in his or her understanding of what that text is (Palm, 2009, pp. 286–287).

The value of fictional texts is connected to the value and status of reading, which, in its traditional form of reading printed text, has been the focal point of two recent reports. PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment) is an international study aimed to evaluate knowledge development and measure to what extent the education system educates fifteen-year-old students to meet the expectations of the future society. It is an OECD-project (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) conducted every three years and focuses on three areas: mathematics, natural science, and reading comprehension (Skolverket, n.d.b). The PISA-report of 2012 brought alarming headlines in Swedish mass media about the decreasing results of knowledge development among Swedish students. Along with mathematics and natural science, reading comprehension is an area where the results have significantly decreased (Skolverket, 2013). The report also shows that there is a general difference in knowledge development between



boys and girls (Skolverket, 2013). The principal gender-based difference is in reading comprehension, where girls perform 51 points better than boys, though neither the girls nor the boys perform according to OECD-standards (Skolverket, 2013). Furthermore, the results show that it is the already low-performing students who have the largest decrease in reading comprehension (Skolverket, 2013).

*The Culture of Reading* [my translation] is a report conducted on behalf of the Swedish government (SOU, 2012, p. 11). This report focuses on the status of reading and analyses the status of literature (that is, printed fictional texts) in Sweden today, and it identifies developing trends expected to influence this field in the future. The results of the study show that the reading habits of the Swedish population are stable at a high level. However, at the same time, concerns are raised about threats to the high status that printed fictional texts still holds; the main threat being the decreasing reading competence among younger generations (SOU, 2012, p. 11). One effect of the decrease in reading competence among young people is the increasing number of young people, specifically boys, who have a limited ability to understand printed texts (SOU 2012, p. 11). The inability to comprehend fictional texts and possibly printed texts in general affects the reading experience and may thus lead to a larger decrease in reading competence.

## **Result and analysis**

### ***The function and status of fictional texts***

The results of the interviews show that, for the teachers, fictional texts serve several purposes in the teaching of literature. Three participants (C, D, E) explain that they use fictional texts as a tool to broaden the students' horizons as well as their reading experiences. Teacher C wants the students to "experience that there is like a world in a novel that is not theirs, but which they can feel a part of," while teacher D describes how fictional texts can provide "an insight into other worlds [where the students can] find themselves in a novel, for example, recognise themselves, not feel alone with one's thoughts or ideas." On a similar note, teacher E states, "Reading, it gives you so much more than just reading.... It gives you imagination and creativity, yes, but a kind of travelling, to make students understand that reading can enrich so much." This broadening of the students' horizons clearly includes a connection to other people, other cultures, and other worlds.

Another purpose that fictional texts serve for three of the teachers (A, B, C) is to increase the students' reading competence. Teacher A explains that by using fictional texts he "wants the students to increase their abilities to read." Similarly, teacher B uses fictional texts in order to increase the students' "reading habits, because one sees that it is less and less of that part

since they don't read as much now as people used to." Fictional texts are used to increase the students' reading competence in general since "the understanding of, if I say, daily newspapers, that text is problematic for many of them and fictional texts can often be perceived of as easier," teacher B reports. The improvement of the students' reading competence is a struggle in times when reading is not as highly valued among the students as it once was. Hence, fictional texts are further used to improve the students' general reading competence as well as their specific literary competence.

Fictional texts are also used to improve students' language competence, according to three teachers (C, D, E). These texts "function as examples of how to use adjectives in descriptive texts," teacher C comments and continues, "they can also function as a basis for grammar and how to use grammatical constructions, etc." She further states that a fictional text can be used as a basis for "vocabulary, because that is something that the students need to practice very much today." Concerning vocabulary, teacher C wants her students to "not only translate or find synonyms to the word 'absurd' but to see it in its context." Since literary studies is part of any language subject in school, it is clear that fictional texts are used to improve the students' *literacy* competence as well as their *literary* competence. The participating teachers use fictional texts in literary studies for several purposes of which literary experience, literary competence, and literacy competence are considered most important.

Without being asked about the status of reading fictional texts, four teachers (A, B, C, E) want to express their concern for the decrease in reading habits and hence in the status of reading. Teacher C explains,

The group [of students] that read is decreasing, that's just how it is. I am totally convinced about that and I don't need to see any statistics. I only need to see how my students react when we talk about books and when I ask how many can tell me the title of their favourite novel, there are more and more who answer: I have never read a novel.

In particular, older texts and classics seem to be particularly difficult for students to read, according to the participating teachers' experience (A, B, C). Teacher C further explains that, when it comes to the classics, the students have misconceptions that "what is written by the great authors is heavy and boring and deadly serious and very difficult." It thus becomes a task for the teacher to overcome these misconceptions and at the same time inspire the students to read novels in general and classics in particular.

One reason for the low status of reading is, as teacher A reports, that there are "so many other things that have taken over." The decrease in reading habits does not mean a decrease in reading abilities, which teacher E

points out: "I don't really believe that it is the ability, that is, I mean the ability to read, but it is rather the ability to take the time, sit down, do something that is yet a slow form of art." Reading clearly competes with other forms of using stories as a means of entertainment and relaxation—that is, there are many ways and media forms through which stories are experienced today, for example, watching films and TV series, playing computer games, etc.

A problem with the decrease in the status of reading and, thus, in reading habits is the opposition between new times and old values, as teacher C comments:

We live in a world that the school cannot stay separate from. The school has to, sort of, be updated, so it is a dilemma, I think, to try to be recent and try to live in the moment, at the same time as we might want to teach things that belong to another time when there were other values.

This fusion of old values and new times seems to be something the teachers struggle with together with the struggle of inspiring, or perhaps forcing, the students to read novels in literary studies.

### **Text forms**

In literary studies, *printed* fictional texts are very much at the centre of attention, which can be seen in the teachers' use of them in literary studies, as well as in their concern for the status of reading novels. This section thus focuses on what (printed) text forms the participating teachers use, what texts they see that the students prefer, and whether they see that text forms have any effect on student performance.

When asked what text types or genres they use in literary studies, all the teachers (A, B, C, D, E) answer that they predominantly use novels. "When it comes to novels," teacher B states, "we usually read one per semester." Teacher C explains that her "point of departure is that the students should see examples of fictional texts both classics and more recent." Regarding shorter pieces of fictional texts, the text forms that are used consist of extracts from novels (D, E), short stories (A, C, D, E), and poetry (B, C, D). Teacher C's reason for using poetry is "to show the students that it is not as weird as they think." Besides these printed texts, two teachers (B, D) use drama but do not explain if they use the performances or printed versions of the plays. The participating teachers predominantly use novels, but also other text forms and genres in the teaching of literature.

Four of the participating teachers (B, C, D, E) report that their students prefer fictional texts that appear realistic such as novels that are based on a true story and tell the story of a person's journey through a difficult experi-

ence. Teacher B states that “it is real events that are absolutely the most important” when students choose novels. In particular, “many girls want to read about people who struggle very much. They are abused physically and sexually,” teacher C claims. Teacher E refers to these novels as “confession novels, that is, the so-called autobiographies.” “First and foremost, it is cool if it says in the blurb that this is the true story,” teacher C explains and further stresses that the readers “somehow revel in people’s misery.” This interest in confession novels is, teacher E notices, “close to what we do with social media; that is, we retell something that has happened and that is what we do on Facebook as well or through our blogs, so it is somehow familiar.” The attraction of experiencing someone else’s story is not new, though the appearance of it as real might cause an extra thrill, and it relates to the increase in reality shows on TV and the sharing of people’s lives in social media. To read about someone who struggles might create a sense of community, that you are not alone with your problems, or alternatively, it might make your own problems seem smaller.

Besides this interest in novels that are based on true stories, three teachers (A, B, C) notice that the students prefer texts that belong to the fantasy genre, or more specifically, vampire stories (B, C, E). “These vampire stories have been rather interesting,” teacher E comments, while teacher B reflects upon the popularity of vampire stories: “that is something that shines through in various places in society, not only in novels.” Popular literature in general, not only vampire stories, is also widespread among the students, three teachers report (A, C, D). One teacher (B) explains that her students prefer texts that are easy to read, youth literature, or love stories, while another (E) reports that her students enjoy reading autobiographies about sports athletes, such as “Zlatan’s book, that is, what is fairly recent.” Neither the realistic nor the fantasy genres are new phenomena, and it is not surprising that the students want to be updated and read what their friends read so that they are not left out since sharing a story creates a sense of community.

The teachers report that student performance is not dependent on the type of text or genre that is used in literary studies. Instead, it is the students’ commitment that matters the most when it comes to performance (B, C, E). Teacher B explains that “if it is what they are interested in, they will engage more,” and teacher C similarly claims, “I would say that they perform better when they are committed. There is definitely a connection between the two.... If students read texts that they do not like, they perform poorly.” Hence, whether the students like the texts or not, whether they are committed to them or not, influences their performances. Teacher D has also noticed the correlation: “On the Social Science Programme, they [the students] are eager for high grades, so if reading a novel is required, they will read a novel.” However, besides commitment, she sees another factor that affects student performance:

I would rather say that there is a difference between those who are used to reading and those who are not used to reading in what they do with the novel and what they see in it, which conclusions they draw and which analyses they make. This I rather believe. Genre, I believe, does not matter much. (D)

According to the teachers, reading experience and the strive for a high grade are thus factors that, added to the students' commitment or engagement, clearly influence student performance, not what text forms that are used.

### **Media forms**

There are numerous fictional texts and stories told through various media forms today. Hence, a part of the present study aims to examine whether these stories are used in literary studies and, if so, for what purpose. Furthermore, the study examines which media forms the teachers see that their students prefer and are familiar with and whether they notice any differences in preference based on gender or chosen educational programme. This section also focuses on whether the teachers see that the choice of media forms affects student performance.

When asked what media forms they use in literary studies apart from printed texts, the participating teachers (A, B, C, D, E) explain that they primarily use film. Teacher A states that "first and foremost, it is film and it has been easier to access through the possibility of using the computer and its content in various ways so we can be online and stream, so we can be fairly updated." Two of the teachers (A, C) use TV-programmes about authors and literary époques—not as fictional texts, but as narratives. Similarly, blogs are used by two teachers (A, E), but not as texts that they analyse. Instead, teacher A uses blogs as a writing exercise; where he previously had an exercise asking the students to write about their summer breaks, he now uses a "summer blog."

Other media forms that are used occasionally are song lyrics and pictures (C), music videos (D), reading aloud (D), and dramatizations (B). Teacher D comments, "I am not into blogging and templates and such; instead, it is printed books, yes, and an occasional film, and yes, a music video that I use so far". Although reading aloud and listening to an audiobook by Jonas Gardell on tape a long time ago worked very well and was appreciated by the students (A), neither teacher uses audiobooks as part of their regular teaching of literary studies. They do, however, use audiobooks to facilitate reading comprehension for students with low reading abilities or dyslexia (A, B, E) or for all students who prefer them as replacements of the printed novels (C). Audiobooks are a good tool for students who have difficulties in

reading, but they are also fictional texts with certain values that can be used and analysed in literary studies and not only be seen as substitutes.

All the participating teachers experience that the media form their students prefer the most is film. Teacher B reports that “film is always what they prefer” and gives two reasons for it, namely, because “it is easy” and because “they are used to watching films.” On a similar note, teacher C claims that the students “suggest that we watch film because they want to have peace and quiet.” She also admits to using film as a teaching strategy: “I believe that you need to sneak in some things in their [the students’] daily lives in order to trick them and then it is a, well, film can be a very good tool, I think” (C). At the same time, she notices a risk with using film in literary studies:

There is a danger if you show them [the students] all the time that you can acquire this text by watching the movie, or watching these pictures, or listening to this music, so maybe you lose the fact that acquiring a text initially requires a certain amount of work, and if you avoid that work, you will not learn to acquire texts. (C)

This fear of the students losing the ability to acquire texts, particularly novels, connects to the struggle all the teachers have with the students not being used to or willing to read longer printed fictional texts today. Although there is an expressed concern for the dangers of watching too much film, it is the media form that the teachers use the most apart from printed texts and also the media form they report that the students prefer the most.

Irrespective of the reason for the students’ preference of film, their interest in films is changing. Teacher E explains, “film used to be a thrill, but now it is more blasé, that, ‘oh, this movie is so old’ or ‘why do we need to watch this?’ But even so,” she continues, “film is still number one”. The reason for this is, she says, that watching film “you don’t have to do the work yourself. You just sit there and are, sort of, fed with something or it is poured over you at the same time as you can fiddle with your phone; yes, it’s cynical, but we are there” (E). In spite of it all, she admits that the students “know much about film. They have watched a tremendous amount of film” (E). The students’ recreational habits, among other things watching films to a great extent, thus contribute to a huge knowledge bank concerning film.

When asked whether they have noticed if the students are familiar with fictional texts in various media forms, two teachers (A, E) answer that the students appear to be more familiar with computer- and console games, films, and blogs than they are with printed texts. However, that is not something teacher D has noticed. The familiarity with stories through various media forms is most likely acquired outside of the school context and would not be noticed by the teachers if they were not used in a school context.

Three teachers (B, D, E) answer that they see a gender-based difference in familiarity with fictional texts in various media forms. Teacher D reports that she "notices that playing console games is a boy-thing to a larger extent," and teacher B claims that "film and boys have always worked best so to speak." Similarly, boys have watched more film (E), and girls have read more (B). Teacher C offers an explanation for this difference in familiarity with printed texts and films:

Right now there are articles in DN [a Swedish national newspaper] stating that you are not supposed to study because, if you do, you are not considered masculine enough. Perhaps it is a similar case with reading, that it is somewhat suspicious in certain contexts when it comes to boys, boys who read.

Whether it is peer pressure or interest that causes this gender-based difference in familiarity with fictional texts in various media forms, the teachers' suspicions have been confirmed in a previous study focusing on the media habits of Swedish youth in which it is shown that girls spend more time reading and writing printed fictional texts in a school as well as a recreational context (Svensson, 2014).

In addition to the difference between boys and girls, four teachers (A, B, D, E) also notice a difference in familiarity with fictional texts in various media forms between students who study on a theory-based programme compared to those who study on a practice-based programme. Teacher A notices that the students who study on theory-based programmes play more sophisticated computer/console games than the students who study on practice-based programmes. Teacher E reports a difference in familiarity as her students on the Economics programme show a "stronger reading tradition than [students on] the Sports programme or Transportation programme—much, much stronger." Particularly, the students on the Transportation programme show low familiarity with reading printed fictional texts: "a class at the Transportation programme is hardly possible to get to read," teacher B explains and adds, "and perhaps I don't demand it either." This programme-based difference in familiarity with fictional texts in various media forms is noticeable, from the teachers' perspectives, in the students' behaviours and also in the teachers' behaviours. Not only the reading performance but also the expectations are lower in a class on a practice-based programme.

Just as with text forms, media forms do not influence student performance according to four of the teachers (B, C, D, E). Instead, motivation has the greatest effect on student performance, teacher B comments: "I find that it is about motivated students and students who aim for high grades, because if you want a high grade and are conscious about it, you probably work hard with whatever the teacher gives you really." Teacher E has a similar experi-

ence: “if you watch a film and work with it afterwards, you have some [students] who do it well and some not so well and it is the same with novels really. I think that the end result is pretty much the same anyway.” It is the teachers’ experience that motivation for a high grade rather than media form influences student performance. The question one needs to ask then is, how can you motivate students with other factors besides grade? Would it be possible to motivate less goal, or grade, oriented students through using a media form that they are familiar with?

### ***Discussion***

The aim of this study was to investigate to what extent and in what way(s) various text and media forms are used in literary studies at upper secondary level through an interview study with five teachers. Since the number of participants is five, the results of the study are not applicable for generalisations, but that was not the purpose of the study. Instead, the aim was to focus on the teacher’s experiences and reflections of the texts they use in the teaching of literature.

In this section, the results are discussed with a particular focus on the research questions that have been a guiding principle throughout the study. Hence, the discussion focuses on the three parts: text forms, media forms, and their possible effect(s) on student performance.

### ***Text forms***

In response to the first research question regarding what fictional texts the participating teachers use when teaching literature and what their functions are, it is clear that the teachers predominantly use printed texts such as novels, extracts from novels, short stories, poetry, and plays. Among these text forms, novels seem to have a high status among the participating teachers, who raise concern over the fact that the students in general do not read novels, and they express a collective concern over how to make their students interested in reading novels as part of their literary studies. It is first and foremost literary values—such as, meaning-making processes, identity processes, and world-views—that the teachers fear the students will miss. In addition, they also fear that the students will not be able to develop the particular analysis and interpretation skills that reading printed texts is believed to provide. Discussing the value of printed fictional texts, Palm (2009) claims that “the reading itself is an activity that generates value” (p. 283, my translation). When people do not read, they might miss that way of creating values. Palm further states that “[l]iterary value judgements are ... based on a basic comprehension of what ‘literature’ is” (p. 286–87, my translation), and if someone does not have the required literary comprehension, he or she might not be able to make literary value judgements. This ability is part of



the literary experience and is significant for identity creation and meaning-making processes. However, there might be other ways through which this value is created, since this ability might be transferable to multimodal texts. The great knowledge that the students have about various multimodal fictional texts would mean that they are highly competent in making value judgements about multimodal texts, that they perceive the “narrative competence” that is required for various types of texts (Lundström & Olin-Scheller, 2010). This competence could perhaps be used to inspire someone to read and, thus, develop a competence related to printed fictional texts.

The teachers’ fears echo the results of the study *The Culture of Reading* (SOU, 2012) conducted on behalf of the Swedish government and the much-debated PISA report from 2012 (Skolverket, 2013). The two reports present a picture of Swedish youth as a non-reading population, where both young men and young women show a decrease in reading comprehension. The decrease is, however, more severe for young men (Skolverket, 2013). In a school context, the participating teachers notice that it is not the *ability* to read that is decreasing but rather the *interest* in reading, especially longer fictional texts, as one teacher points out. The teachers express a wish to bring the students to the text, to read it, to learn from it, and to share the values it provides. They do not primarily wish to bring the text to the students by using multimodal texts because of the knowledge and value that the students might lose as a result of not reading novels. Clearly, printed fictional texts (particularly novels) are the norm in a Swedish literary educational context, and fictional texts in other media forms are seen as substitutes for the novel rather than as having unique values in their own right. Is it possible that using multimodal texts in literary studies distances the students further from printed texts, from novels, or could they function as a bridge between the students and printed texts? If multimodal texts are treated as equally valuable as printed texts, and not as replacements, the literary experience they provide could perhaps give the students a literary confidence and, in turn, encourage reading experiences.

### **Media forms**

In connection with the second research question regarding what media forms the participating teachers use when teaching literature and what their functions are, the results of the study show that there is an absence of multimodal fictional texts in literary studies except for film, which is the multimodal fictional text that is used most regularly and most frequently by all the teachers. To work with a film requires some similar, but also some different, analytical tools and skills than working with a printed text. However, it is not the analytical competence that is in focus when the teachers use film in literary studies. Rather, it is often used to facilitate the learning process by re-

placing novels that are difficult to read, such as the classics, or to catch the students' interest for the story in the hope that it will help them or inspire them to read the novel. The teachers see that the students are familiar with film as a medium, that they show great knowledge about films, and that they place high demands on films. One question that arises in connection with this is, can the teachers in turn place equally high demands on the students' abilities to work with or analyse film?

Since the results further emphasise the students' knowledge of film—as well as TV series, computer games, etc.—it would be fruitful to investigate further if, and how, these fictional texts can be incorporated into the learning processes. It is the teachers' task to use fictional texts in various media forms in literary studies as part of teaching their students text production and reading comprehension, as stated in the steering documents (Lpf 94, Gy11). However, is it possible to provide that which they do not acquire outside of school and, at the same time, use the knowledge that they already have acquired in a recreational context?

The results further show that there is a gender-based difference when it comes to media form, as experienced by the teachers, in that male students use computer games and film to a greater extent and female students read more printed texts. This difference is in line with the reports provided by PISA and SOU. Another difference is programme-based. The teachers do not use as many or as difficult printed texts on the practice-based programmes as they do on the theory-based programmes. Thus, it is not only the students' but also the teachers' attitudes and behaviours that maintain this difference. As pointed out by Siegel (2006), there are many benefits from using multimodal texts in the educational process, especially for students whose linguistic competence is less than required. The students on practice-based programmes in particular might thus benefit from a larger variety of multimodal fictional texts in their literary studies.

The text and media forms teachers chose to include in the teaching of literature affect the students' education process and knowledge development. "What happens when young people use stories in other, new ways?" Lundström and Olin-Scheller ask (2010, p. 109, my translation) as they develop the concept of narrative competence to broaden the concept of literary competence so that it includes the competences one needs and develops when using multimodal texts. Hence, it is relevant to ask, could it not be useful to develop the students' interpretation and analysis competence through a media form that they are familiar with?

## **Performance**

When the teachers point out that it is their experience that neither text form nor media form has an impact on student performance and, at the same time, explain that they do not use multimodal texts to a high degree, it is unclear whether text and media forms, particularly multimodal texts, do not have an apparent impact on student performance because the teachers do not use them or whether the teachers do not use them because they do not seem to have any impact?

Instead of a variety of text and media forms, it is predominantly motivation—the aspiration for a high grade—that influences student performance, according to the teachers. Other contributing factors that affect student performance are commitment, interest, engagement, likeability, reading experience, and reading ability. How can interest, commitment, and likeability be created? Since the students frequently use multimodal texts in their recreational time, it seems likely that they should be interested in them. Perhaps it would be possible to draw on that interest and commitment in literary studies? The teachers experience that students who are motivated and conscious about their grades perform well regardless of teaching material. The question is whether and how a greater variety of multimodal fictional texts such as TV series and computer games would affect students who are not already motivated by a higher grade. The PISA-report shows that it is the already low-performing students who have the biggest decrease in reading comprehension (Skolverket, 2013). Can these students feel interest, commitment, and likeability when using a multimodal text, and can this text then create a bridge to the printed text, novel, that is the preferred text to use in a Swedish school context?

## **Conclusion**

To conclude, there are three results that are particularly important and that may be used as a basis for further research into this area. First, the absence of multimodal fictional texts in literary studies is noteworthy. Despite the fact that it is clearly stated in the steering documents that film and other media *should be* used, it is predominantly printed texts and films that *are* used. The fact that the teachers do not see that multimodal fictional texts have an influence on student performance is something that would be fruitful to analyse further, particularly from a student perspective.

Second, the teachers fear that the students who do not read novels will lose certain competences and values—a fear that echoes the two reports (PISA and SOU) discussed in this article. However, it would be fruitful to study these reports closer and see what competences are referred to when "reading" is measured. Is it possible that the students have other compe-

tences acquired from their extensive use and knowledge of multimodal fictional texts?

Third, the discrepancy between the fictional texts the students use at home and at school is extensive. It is, of course, the role of the educational system to provide the students with knowledge and competences that they do not acquire at home. However, further research could provide an answer to these questions, is it possible to use the knowledge that the students have about multimodal fictional texts to a greater extent in literary studies? And, if so, what would be the best way to do it?

## References

- Alexandersson, Mikael & Hansson, Thomas (2011). *Unga nätmiljöer: Nya villkor för samarbete och lärande*. Lund: Studentlitteratur.
- Bruner, Jerome K (2002). *Kulturens väv*. Göteborg: Daidalos.
- Denzin, Norman K. & Lincoln, Yvonna S. (2011). Introduction: The Discipline and Practice of Qualitative Research. In Norman K. Denzin & Yvonna S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research*. (1-20). London: Sage.
- Elmfeldt, Johan & Erixon, Per-Olof (2007). *Skrift i rörelse: Om genrer och kommunikativ förmåga i skola och medielandskap*. Stockholm: Brutus Östlings Bokförlag Symposion.
- Fairclough, Norman (1995). *Media discourse*. London: Edward Arnold.
- Galleta, A (2013). *Mastering the semi-structured interview and beyond: From research design to analysis and publication*. New York: New York University Press.
- Graffman, Katarina & Fredriksson, Johan (2010). *Jag ser mig: En etnografisk studie av barns och ungas förhållande till programmet Idol*. Stockholm: Medierådet.
- Kotler, Philip (1986). The Prosumer Movement: A New Challenge for Marketers. In Richard J. Lutz (Ed.), *Advances in Consumer Research*, 13. (510-513). Provo: Association for Consumer Research.
- Kress, Gunther R. (2003). *Literacy in the new media age*. London: Routledge.
- Levy, Michael (1997). *Computer-assisted Language Learning: Context and Conceptualisation*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Linderöth, Jonas & Olsson, Camilla (2010). *Världen som spelplan – gränsöverskridande i onlinespelskulturen*. Stockholm: Medierådet.
- Lundström, Stefan & Olin-Scheller, Christina (2010). Narrativ kompetens: En förutsättning i multimodala textuniversum? *Tidskrift för Litteraturvetenskap*, 2010:3-4, 107-117.
- Medierådet (2008). *Ungar & medier. Fakta om barns och ungas användning och upplevelser av medier*. Stockholm: Medierådet.
- Multimodality (n.d.). *Oxford English Dictionary*. Access. <http://www.oed.com>
- Olin-Scheller, Christina (2008). *Såpor istället för Strindberg? Litteraturundervisning i ett nytt medielandskap*. Stockholm: Natur & Kultur.

- Palm, Anders (2009). Egenart, egenskaper, egenvärden. Bidrag till en litterär värdeteori. In Anders Mortensen (Ed.), *Litteraturens värden*. (281-309). Eslöv: Brutus Östlings förlag Symposion.
- Persson, Magnus (2007). *Varför läsa litteratur? Om litteraturundervisningen efter den kulturella vändningen*. Lund: Studentlitteratur.
- Person, Magnus (2012). *Den goda boken. Samtida föreställningar om litteratur och läsning*. Lund: Studentlitteratur.
- Siegel, Marjorie (2006). Rereading the Signs: Multimodal Transformations in the Field of Literacy Education. *Language Arts*, 84:1, 65-77.
- Skolverket (1994). Läroplan för de frivilliga skolformerna (Lpf 94). Stockholm: Skolverket.
- Skolverket (2011). Läroplan, examensmål och gymnasiegemensamma ämnen för gymnasieskola 2011 (Gy11). Stockholm: Skolverket.
- Skolverket (2013). Kraftig försämring i PISA. <http://www.skolverket.se/press/pressmeddelanden/2013/kraftig-forsamring-i-pisa-1.211208> (Accessed 2014-06-18).
- Skolverket (n.d.a). Ett vidgat textbegrepp. <http://www.skolverket.se/kursplaner-och-betyg/2.2454/2.2911/2.3115/ett-vidgat-textbegrepp-1.14749> (Accessed 2012-02-16).
- Skolverket (n.d.b). PISA i korthet. <http://www.skolverket.se/statistik-och-utvardering/internationella-studier/pisa> (Accessed 2014-06-18).
- SOU 2012:65. *Läsandets kultur. Slutbetänkande av litteraturutredningen*. Stockholm: Fritzes.
- Sundqvist, Pia (2009). *Extramural English matters: Out-of-school English and its impact on Swedish ninth graders' oral proficiency and vocabulary*. (Doctoral Dissertation). Karlstad: Karlstad University Studies.
- Svensson, Anette (2014). The media habits of young people in Sweden: The use of fictional texts in school and recreational contexts. *Education Inquiry*, 5:3, 1-21.
- Svensson, Patrik (2008). *Språkutbildning i en digital värld - Informationsteknik, kommunikation och lärande*. Stockholm: Norstedts Akademiska Förlag.
- Toffler, Alvin (1980). *The Third Wave*. New York: Bantam.
- Vigmo, Sylvi (2010). *New Spaces for Language Learning: A study of Student Interaction in Media Production in English*. (Doctoral Dissertation). Göteborg: Acta Universitatis Gothoburgensis.