Aesthetic Dimensions of Literary Studies: Multimodality and Creative Learning

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Abstract

In Sweden, the occurrence of fictional texts in various media formats, including TV series, films, and computer games, most of which are in English, is constantly growing. In an increasingly digitalised society, there is a need for teaching that understands and meets the demand for aesthetic values as well as multimodality and creativity. Highlighting the aesthetic dimension of literary studies, this article reports on a small-scale practice-based study that explores students' experiences of working with a teaching unit that focuses on text universes, literary productions, and creative learning. It argues for an innovative type of course design with the potential to strengthen students' engagement in, and their self-assessed understanding of, literary texts, which can inspire future English teachers to adopt similar approaches in their own teaching practice.

The teaching unit was included in a programme for upper-secondary subject teachers in English. The empirical data consists of 14 students' responses to a questionnaire that was conducted after the completion of the unit. The study shows that although some students initially found the teaching unit challenging, they later acknowledged having acquired significant insights into their own and their peers' creative processes. Because student autonomy and student responsibility are central aspects when teaching for creativity, the teaching unit provided the students with a model that addresses the *what* and the *how* of literature teaching and learning, a model that they themselves want to use in their future careers as English teachers at the upper secondary level.

Keywords: teacher education, literary education, literature teaching and learning, creativity, literary production, text universe

Teaching English literature in an increasingly digitalised classroom

In Sweden, the use of various digital tools, such as smart phones, tablets and laptops, to communicate with others is constantly expanding (The Swedish Internet Foundation 2020). Young people in particular are increasingly exposed to the English language, and students of various

ages, though not all, learn English to a great extent in an informal context outside the classroom through, for example, computer games (Sundqvist 2019), movies, TV series (Asp 2011), and the internet (Estling Vannestål 2009). Following the digital reform in society at large, there is also an increase in the use of digital fictional texts in English—watching films or TV series, playing computer or app-based games, listening to audiobooks, reading e-books, listening to music, and watching music videos, many of which are multimodal (The Swedish Media Council 2019).[1] Hence, students meet and use multimodal texts, particularly fictional multimodal texts, in the English language to a great extent outside the classroom (Svensson 2014; Lundström & Svensson 2017b).

In the wake of developments in research within the Humanities, current research in the field of literature teaching and learning focuses to a large extent on the uses and functions of fictional texts (e.g. Persson 2007; Felski 2008). Although it has been productive for the research field to focus on the question of *why* we teach literature, this article re-addresses the questions of *what* and *how* we teach literature, as the Swedish educational system is undergoing a digital reform that affects not only how students learn English, but also how they use stories and how they construct meaning in relation to them. Addressing the issue of *what,* that is, which fictional texts are used in literary studies in English, this article draws on the discrepancy between the fictional texts students use in recreational and in educational contexts, and thereby incorporates a variety of text and media formats in order to use the knowledge the students have gained in an informal learning context. Addressing the issue of *how* fictional texts are used in literary studies, this article focuses on creative learning and literary production as the means to develop analytical competence as it explores students' experiences with and opinions on working with these aspects in literary studies in English.

In the Nordic countries, most research focusing on teaching and learning literature at primary, secondary, and upper secondary levels focuses on the country's first language(s) (L1), for example, comparative literature in the Swedish subject in Sweden. When it comes to research on English as a foreign language (EFL) in Sweden, most research concerns

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[1] A multimodal text is one that uses multiple modes or modalities (Merriam-Webster: n.p.), including various semiotic resources in the form of typographic text and images, other visual elements such as moving pictures, or auditive elements such as music or spoken interaction.

the teaching and learning of languages and applied linguistics. Accordingly, in Sweden, there is a need for research on literature teaching and learning in English, as well as in other language subjects. This is particularly noteworthy in research concerning the aesthetic value of literary studies in English as a foreign language. In an increasingly digitalized society, there is a need for teachers who understand and promote aesthetic values as well as multimodality (Kress & van Leeuwen 2001), flexibility (Robinson 2011), and creativity (Craft 2005). In response to these needs, this article focuses on the challenge of preparing teacher students in English for teaching English literature in an increasingly digitalised setting and with special emphasis on the aesthetic dimension of literary studies. It reports on a small-scale study that explores students' experiences of working with a teaching unit focusing on text universes, literary productions, and creative learning. The article presents an innovative type of course design with the potential to strengthen students' engagement in, and self-assessed understanding of, literary texts, and inspire them as future English teachers to experiment with similar approaches in their own teaching practice.

Multimodal text universes and creative learning
As an effect of the increased exposure to English in Sweden and the other Nordic countries, it is increasingly important for students and the public in general to acquire a good level of English (Lindberg 2009). Inger Lindberg discusses various risks with conditions in which the English language gains the highest status in Swedish society. One such risk is described as follows:

> an increased social division between people with good knowledge of English and thus access to prestigious positions in society, and people with limited or no knowledge of English, who would therefore be marginalised and excluded from the possibility to reach important and influential positions in society. (Lindberg 2009: 11, my translation)[2]

Relatedly, academia is an area in which the English language is gaining status in relation to Swedish. It is particularly noteworthy in the disciplines of technology, medicine, and natural sciences in which students use

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[2] In her article, Lindberg relates this particular idea to Kenneth Hyltestam's chapter, 'Svenska i minoritetsspråksperspektiv' (1999).

English as the main professional language (Gunnarsson 2004). Another example of an area in which the English language is frequently used is in social media and online communities. Depending on how and how much people engage in these activities, their English might be improved (see for example, Cabau 2009; Sundqvist 2009; Sundqvist & Sylvén 2012). Per-Olof Erixon (2012) argues that Sweden is a multimodal society. For instance, in addition to the internet and social media, many people have access to and use *fictional texts* in English in various media formats, such as films, TV series, and computer games. Young people are mass consumers of these media formats (The Swedish Media Council 2019), as they grow up in what Sonia Livingstone calls a 'screen culture' (2002), which means that they acquire knowledge of not only English, but also about stories in an informal context through various audio-visual media formats.

This screen culture affects young people in particular since they use (e.g. read, watch, play, listen to, write, perform) stories in various media formats extensively (The Swedish Media Council 2019), and spend much time using stories via TV series, films, and computer games (Lundström & Svensson 2017b; Svensson 2014). It is common for young people to use stories within and across various media formats, for example, watch the film, read the novel, play the game, listen to the soundtrack, and watch the TV series. In other words, they participate in *text universes*: when (parts of) *the same storyworld* is transferred to various text and media formats, the various *re-presentations* form a text universe (Svensson & Lundström 2019). There is, thus, a source text that is re-presented in different versions, often through cross-mediation (Zazzera 1995, cited in Giovagnoli 2011) or transmedia storytelling (Jenkins 1992). An ever-expanding text universe may consist of a vast number of texts in different shapes, forms, and qualities. The various re-presentations can be divided into three categories (Svensson 2013; Lundström & Svensson 2017a; Svensson & Lundström 2019). A *remake* is a story made *again*—a repetition of the same story but in a new and/or different fashion. This might be achieved through the transfer of the story to a new medium, for example, an adaptation. In a *makeover*, the story is made *anew*—an alteration of the story to fit a new audience, for example, through variation novels and fan fiction. Finally, in *faction*, a fictional story is entirely or partially made non-fictive or made to appear as real. Examples of this

category are vlogs and Twitter accounts (Svensson 2013; Lundström & Svensson 2017a; Svensson & Lundström 2019).

A text universe is dynamic and constantly being re-shaped by individual participants when they encounter new re-presentations. This is considered advantageous as teaching material in literary studies (Lundström & Svensson 2017a; Svensson & Lundström 2019; Svensson & Haglind, 2020). One advantage is that it facilitates challenging the students at their various levels while working with the same story using a variety of re-presentations in various lengths, genres, media, and levels of difficulty from the same text universe. Another possible advantage is that the school tacitly acknowledges the value of texts and media formats that young people are using in recreational contexts. Stefan Lundström and Anette Svensson (2017a) assert that, in L1 literary studies, using text universes already familiar to the students in a recreational context has the potential to expand learning opportunities. They also point out that in doing so, concepts and perspectives that have not been used previously in the classroom need to be added to the traditional perspectives of literary studies. Working with a text universe in L2 literary studies in English is central to the teaching unit applied in this study.

The *Curriculum for the upper secondary school in Sweden* (2013) points out that encouraging the 'ability of students to find, acquire and apply new knowledge' is a task to be taken on by the school (The Swedish National Agency for Education 2013: 5). In addition, the school should 'stimulate students' creativity, curiosity and self-confidence, as well as their desire to explore and transform new ideas into action, and find solutions to problems' (The Swedish National Agency for Education 2013: 5–6). The intention is for upper secondary schools in Sweden to educate for a changing society in which flexibility and creativity are highly valued competencies. Anna Linge (2012) describes the 'need for a creative education that develops the ability for flexibility and adjustment, skills that will be significant in meeting the upcoming changes in market demands in the near future' (253, my translation). In addition to a creative education, the school needs, according to Anna Craft (2005), to educate *for* creativity. Doing so promotes the development of students' creative learning process—a process that leads to student participation in an innovative learning environment, allowing them to control their activities and their own learning processes, as well as experiencing the tasks as relevant (Craft

2005). To educate for creativity requires a pedagogic approach that encourages creativity and independence (Craft 2005).

The Swedish society's demand for creative citizens is not the only reason why it is important for schools to develop students' creative learning processes. Another reason is, as Linge (2012) points out, to develop the students' full potential. A previous study focusing on creative learning in upper secondary schools found that after primary school, students experienced working creatively only in art and music subjects (Svensson & Haglind 2020). Similarly, Ken Robinson (2011) states that creative teaching and learning approaches are common in primary school, but in secondary school such approaches are often replaced by more traditional academic practices targeting material required for standardized tests.

It is fruitful to use creative learning in literary studies because it is part of a child's development into adolescence, as Lev Vygotsky points out in his work on 'Imagination and Creativity in Childhood' (2004). In this work, he discusses the importance of creativity in children and adolescents from a psychological perspective. Creative activity, he claims, 'results not in the reproduction of previously experienced impressions or actions but in the creation of new images or actions' (9). Creativity is an essential condition for existence already discernible in children's play and expression: 'A child's play is not simply a reproduction of what he has experienced, but a creative reworking of the impressions he has acquired. He combines them and uses them to construct a new reality' (11). Hence, creativity, which draws on imagination, is vital during adolescence when the internal world is developing. During this stage of life, it is common to take up writing instead of drawing, the typical way children express their creativity (Vygotsky 2004). As such, the creative process can also be seen as a process that depends on, and develops, linguistic abilities because written language is more complex and has rules. Vygotsky provides an example of how children struggle with the creative process when they are instructed to write on a given topic in school, and in particular when they are instructed to copy the narrative style of adults or books. Instead, he argues, 'education in general and teaching children creative writing in particular is not only possible but completely inevitable' (50). This is also the case for adolescents who, during puberty, find themselves at a turning point that is associated with increased intensity and volatility of emotions (Vygotsky 2004). Through the process of creative writing, language helps

adolescents express complex inner relationships. This process is important 'because it permits the child, by exercising his creative tendencies and skills, to master human language, this extremely subtle and complex tool for forming and expressing human thoughts, human feelings, and the human inner world' (Vygotsky 2004: 69). Creative writing and creative literary production at large are particularly significant means of expression for children and adolescents.

Drama is considered a particularly effective form of expression for creative and imaginative processes; in drama, the imagination is embodied and realized during the preparatory phases as well as during the performance on stage (Vygotsky 2004). The reason it is such a rewarding form of expression is because it combines dramatization with play, which is the foundation for creativity (Vygotsky 2004). Having a clear aim and being aware of the goal of the production facilitate the creative process. It is imperative, according to Vygotsky, to cultivate creativity in school-age children and adolescents: the 'entire future of humanity will be attained through the creative imagination; orientation to the future, behavior based on the future and derived from this future, is the most important function of the imagination' (87-88). For teachers of today and tomorrow, encouraging and enhancing students' creative imagination as well as their creative learning are essential.

Creative writing is a popular subject area at Swedish universities. In parallel to the rise of creative writing in the USA, Andrew Cowan (2016) explains that the initial response to creative writing in the UK 'has been marked by a scepticism bordering on contempt' (40). This scepticism may be related to the idea that writing cannot be taught because '"true originality" cannot be taught' (40). Creative writing, applied in literary practices, was simultaneously 'an experiment in education and a creative-critical enterprise whose goal was critical understanding', Cowan argues (2016: 44). As such, creative writing was an act of learning by doing, and the reason for incorporating learning by doing into the academy was 'the particular insights offered by creative practice in the study of literature' (2016: 58). The underlying idea of creative writing as a way to develop critical understanding and literary analysis is useful in the present study, although this study adopts a wider perspective of literary production in its various shapes and forms, for example, writing and performing a song or creating an online game.

The use of creative learning in literary studies in English is valuable because many students today consume and some also produce fictional texts in English. Through popular culture—TV series, films, computer games, and graphic novels—they are exposed to fictional stories in various text and media formats in the English language. Similarly, in terms of literary history and the teaching of literary classics, it is likely that students are acquainted with a classic story through a re-presentation, a remake, in a recreational context, for example the films *Macbeth* (2015) or *Jane Eyre* (2011). For this reason, working with not only creative literary production, but also working with text universes in literary studies in English is productive (Svensson & Lundström 2019; Svensson, 2020). Consequently, the present study addresses the questions of *what* and *how* in relation to literature teaching and learning by focusing simultaneously on working with both multimodal texts as presented in text universes and creative literary production. Therefore, the teaching unit discussed in this article challenges the teacher students' creative thinking and makes the process of working with creative learning visible to them.

Students' responses to an applied teaching unit
This small-scale explorative and practice-based study focuses on teacher students' experiences from working with a teaching unit that employs text universes, literary production, and creative learning. The teaching unit 'Creative Learning' was included in the course 'English for upper secondary school teachers 31–60 credits', which is the second term of English studies in the teacher programme, and took place for three weeks during the autumn 2018 term. The course had 16 participants who were studying to become upper secondary school teachers in the subject of English in combination with another subject—social science, Swedish, religion or history.[3]
    In the first step of the teaching unit, the students, in groups of four, were instructed to select one text universe to work with and to familiarise themselves with the source text and various existing re-presentations (film,

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[3] A more detailed description of the design of the teaching unit, though in somewhat different form as it was applied the year before the present study, in 2017, can be found in a previous study, which focuses on analyses of student productions in relation to The Walking Dead text universe (see, Svensson 2020).

game, novel, fan production, variation novel, etc.).[4] They divided the texts amongst themselves so that each student had at least one text that they had not previously encountered.

In the second step, the teacher presented a lecture on 'Text Universe and Creative Learning' followed by a workshop in which the students, in groups, presented 'their' texts to the other group members and then, as a group, selected one aspect or one theme and discussed how this aspect is present in the source text and its various re-presentations. Thereafter, they were asked to create a new re-representation that focuses on this particular aspect, for example friendship in the Harry Potter text universe or gender in the Pride and Prejudice text universe. The new re-presentation is a contribution to the text universe and could be, for example, set in another time, place, or context, or could be, for example, a cross-over, a prequel, or a sequel. In the lecture, the students were introduced to Jenkins' (1992) ten categories of fan production (162–177) for inspiration. In addition to creating a new story, the students were also instructed to select text and media formats suitable for the new story.

In the third step, the students presented their literary productions. Their re-presentations comprised performing a song about friendship in the Harry Potter text universe; reading a fan fiction, also a contribution to the Harry Potter text universe; reading various journal entries that relate to characters in The Walking Dead text universe; and conducting an online dating game/competition in line with the Pride and Prejudice text universe. In addition, they were instructed to provide an analysis of the re-presentation they initially selected as well as reflect on their creations and learning processes.

In order to explore teacher students' experiences of working with the teaching unit 'Creative Learning', they were asked to answer a questionnaire, which they submitted anonymously. The empirical data in the form of the students' replies are presented in the next section. The questionnaire was conducted solely for research purposes after the teaching unit ended and did not affect the students' grades in any way. This had been clearly communicated to the students. The questionnaire consisted of seven questions, for example, 'What have you learned?', that were open to reflective answers. Of the 16 participants in the teaching unit,

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[4] There were nine suggestions relating to the course literature the students had worked with, but they could also choose another one that they were familiar with.

15 completed the questionnaire anonymously in the classroom. One student opted out of the study, leaving a total of 14 questionnaires. During the analysis process, participants' replies were thematically structured into three categories: previous experience working with a text universe, creative learning, and/or literary production; positive and negative experiences with the teaching unit; and learning experience gained from the teaching unit applied.

The overarching aim of this unit is twofold. One goal is to broaden and deepen the students' analytical competence. The other is to provide them with a teaching model that uses a particular *material* in the form of a variety of text and media formats, including graphic novels, computer games, and various fan productions, and a particular *method* that uses and develops the students' creative competences. The teaching unit recognises the need for varied—both analogue and digital—teaching materials and innovative methods that focus on teaching for creativity in line with the ideas of Craft (2005). This need is particularly significant in teacher education which aims to produce teachers who are competent to meet educational needs in the classrooms of tomorrow.

Students' experiences working with creative learning and literary production

The first theme presented explores the students' familiarity with stories in various media formats as well as their experience working with creative learning and literary production prior to the teaching unit. The questions regarding the students' prior experience in those areas relate to the use of stories and literary studies in general and are not restricted to the English subject. Their replies show that they use (consume and/or produce) stories in a variety of media formats in a recreational context, for example, novels, films, TV series, computer games, comics, manga, fan fiction, and fan film. Student 1 explains that when they like a story, and participate in the text universe connected to that story, they 'try to read/watch/play it all!'. The same student explains that if they are interested in the story, they want to take part in the computer game even if they do not play directly: 'I am not very good at playing computer games, so I watch gamers play istead

[sic]'.[5] Predominantly, the participants consume stories. The majority of the students explain that they do not produce any fictional texts: 'I seldom produce any texts at all', Student 1 claims, while Student 2 states: 'I'm not producing anything at the moment'; Student 6 says: 'I do not produce unless interaction in a game counts'. However, one student reports that they want to produce fictional texts: 'I am thinking about producing Teen Wolf fanfiction but I'm not sure if I'm talented enough' (Student 2). Another explains: 'I've played some role-play games with friends (pen and paper games)' (Student 9), which can be seen as both consuming and producing the story since it is created in the moment and in collaboration during the game play. It is noteworthy therefore, that the participating students are familiar with stories in various media formats, and they primarily consume these stories.

In an educational context—in school or at university—most of the students have *not* used texts in various media formats, although some of the students have used multimodal texts, as Student 1 explains: 'Maybe we got to read a book, and then watch a movie-adaptation, as a treat. But we did not work with the movie. For example we read the book *Ondskan*, wrote a reflection. Then we got to see the film (and did nothing with it)'. Another student explains that they watched and worked with an adaptation: 'I think when I was in upper secondary we worked with *Miss Dalloway*, both the movie and very little of the book if I remember correctly' (Student 5). It is thus clear that the students who have experienced working with stories in other media formats than typographic text have worked with films, in particular with adaptations of a story that they have also read: 'I have worked with reading books and then watching films' (Student 7). For these students, it has been more common to work with *remakes* than with *makeovers* in school. Two students state that they have produced *remakes* and *faction*, where Student 4 'once wrote an adaptation of *Dark Souls* for a school assignment', and Student 10 describes: 'I have worked with *The Great Gatsby* by F Scott Fitzgerald where I had to write a news article about his death in a fictional newspaper'. In this example of *faction*, the student used a fictional text and changed the genre into one that appears to be realistic: a newspaper article. Although most of the participating students have not worked with stories

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[5] There are grammatical errors and typos in the students' answers that have not been adjusted in this article; there is no more insertion of [sic] in relation to the students' answers hereafter.

in various media formats in an educational context, there are a few examples that reveal that they predominantly consume remakes and that they occasionally produce remake and faction. In terms of the participants' familiarity with stories in various media formats, it is clear that they use stories in various media formats in a recreational context. Thus, the media formats utilised in the present teaching unit are familiar, but using them as a tool for learning seems to be a relatively unfamiliar approach.

Students' experiences with the applied teaching unit
The second theme presented explores the students' experiences—positive or negative—with the applied teaching unit. All the students describe their experiences of working with creative production during the teaching unit as mainly positive. They explain, for example, that the assignment was 'a lot of fun and very engaging' (Student 2). Student 5 states: 'I think it was fun creating our different personalities and then adapting one's writing style according to our assigned personalities. It was quite engaging, and it was the most intense lesson I've had in a long time'. It is not clear from this answer whether the source of the intensity was performing their own production, watching the other students' productions, or both.

In addition to being a fun and engaging experience, the students explain that they found the creative element of literary production liberating: 'It has been fun with few limitations and to be creative' (Student 7), and inspiring: 'A great way to be creative with the classroom structure!' (Student 9). Some of the students discovered their own sense of creativity during the process:

> In the beginning we had issues actually getting used to use our creative side, which I'm unfortunately not used to anymore when it comes to education. With support and help with our ideas it really turned into something challenging and very fun while learning more about my creative side. (Student 12)

Because the students have not practiced their creative learning in an educational context, it might be intimidating and occasionally inhibiting to be given freedom and responsibility to create something. However, as can be seen in Student 12's commentary, this inexperience can be reversed when they are encouraged and supported by the teacher. Once they were encouraged and pushed a little, the ideas came quickly to the students, who immediately started to work creatively. Instead of inhibiting, the creative process became liberating. One student claims: 'I rarely get to be creative

unless when I write on my free time' and describes that they are happy to be able to use their creative form of expression in an educational context: 'it was very fun and interesting to … demonstrating what I can do since I never show my texts to anyone outside of my family and closest friends' (Student 2). Another student explains that the creative process helped them develop as a person: 'I think that I have learned to enjoy myself in a new way and be more creative and not as strict as a person' (Student 8). As these responses suggest, some students reply that they discovered or rediscovered their creative abilities, and the related effects during the teaching unit.

In addition to discovering and using their creative forms of expression, the students also found it interesting to see their peers' creative forms of expression: 'We got to see so many creative perspectives being performed and that was great!' (Student 1). However, it was not just the result of the creative process that the students found interesting. They also learned from taking part in each other's creative processes: 'it was very fun and interesting to see how others write and think' (Student 2). Some of the students view the group project as a challenge: 'It was hard to choose a topic that everyone felt comfortable with. It's also a challenge to divide the work-load equally in such a creative process' (Student 9). Yet, for some students, the outcome was positive, despite that 'one had to make sacrifices', as Student 5 explains, '[i]n the end, writing a fanfic turned out to be quite fun'. As a result, the discovery of the knowledge one can gain, not only from using one's own creativity, but also from taking part in others' creative processes and taking part of their creative products, is a positive outcome of the teaching unit.

Another positive outcome of the teaching unit that can be seen in the replies is that the students discovered new and varied parts of the storytelling process. In particular, they discovered that storytelling is a process of selections and eliminations. One student found it interesting to be '[e]xperiencing different viewpoints and "avenues" that the author only slightly touched upon or disregarded completely' (Student 6). Even though the students participate in several text universes in their recreational time, the teaching unit helped them gain insight into the vastness of a text universe: 'It gave us the opportunity to dive into the universes and discover how big they really are!' (Student 9), and to reflect upon the endless possibilities of stories: 'It is interesting that one original creation can expand into so many branches' (Student 11). The experience of analysing

various re-presentations (remakes, makeovers, and factions) and producing a re-presentation themselves helped the students focus on the effect of the story being told in a certain way, that is, to analyse the story.

The analytical process, though implicit, was made visible to the students throughout the teaching unit. In addition to noticing that they learned how to analyse the stories, they noticed why analysis is important. Student 2 explains that they learned a lot from the teaching unit: 'It opened my eyes to amazing analytical opportunities'. Another student describes that the teaching unit afforded 'getting a purpose to analyse from a different angle and purpose' (Student 12). This purpose becomes clear when the students are instructed to produce a literary contribution themselves: 'It was also intresting that we got to produce our own addition to the text universe, and not only analyze it' (Student 1). They seem to wish to know what the analysis is for, a means to an end, instead of the end-goal:

> How you view and analyze the universe from a 'different' style – I believe my analysis got more depth since we were actually going to produce something on our own. Usually it is all about the analysis itself, but with this creative learning it also had a reason why we did it and used our analysis in a creative manner. (Student 12)

The students seem to be accustomed to analysing stories, but more for the sake of practicing analysis than using the analysis for a specific purpose. When they are asked to create a story using a source text and various re-presentations, they realise that they have to analyse these texts in order to be able to create the new story with respect to the other texts, thus making the process of analysis and the effects of analysis visible.

Besides the challenge of performing a group activity and possible problems that arise from working together and depending on each other, the students identified the limited time frame as the biggest challenge with this teaching unit:

> Taking into account where everyone lives as well as how much time one could spend going to school to record or anything was the biggest challenge. A radio show, or a simple role-playing scene, could have been much more fun than writing a single diary entry, but one had to make sacrifices. (Student 5)

With more time, they could have tried other, more challenging, texts and media formats and challenged themselves more. Student 1 explains that '[t]ime-limitations are always challenging, but we made it work. It was

also difficult to craft an ide with others. However, the end result was better because of it'. Also, Student 2 would have liked to have more time: 'I would have loved to create something bigger and with more quality'. Besides the limited time frame, one student describes that the challenge of the teaching unit is 'to use/find imagination to do something creative that can be seen as something "new", something that adds some new viewpoints or uses a different kind of medium' (Student 13). This is, of course, the intended challenge with the teaching unit—for the students to practice their creative learning and, through cross- or transmedial storytelling, create something new, a new fictional product that is based on their analyses of the source text and various re-presentations, remakes as well as makeovers and factions. Even though the participants' experiences were predominantly positive, there were a few negative experiences, or challenges, that they identified.

Students' self-assessed learning experiences
The third theme presented explores the students' self-assessed learning experiences gained from the applied teaching unit. In their replies, the students describe their learning experiences in different ways. Some students explain that they learned to 'work in a more creative way' (Student 3), and 'to develop my creativity' (Student 12). Hence, the development or (re-) discovery of their creative competence is important to the students and their creative learning processes. Moreover, some of the students explain that they learned how to analyse stories during this teaching unit. For example, Student 12 states: 'I've learned to analyse text universe from a different perspective and with another goal', indicating that the analysis process applied during this teaching unit differed from other educational experiences. The use of various text and media formats and the ensuing comparative approach also contributed to the development of the students' analytical competence: 'very interesting analyzes can be made when comparing texts from the same universe' (Student 2). In addition to the comparative aspect, the task of creating a literary product plays a part in the students' learning processes, which can be seen when Student 1 claims to have learned '[t]o analyze stories. To se differences and similarities between different works and to ask why and what effect that has to a story. This becomes so much more clearer when you yourself have to write one'. In this way, working with literary production, which the students admitted that they were not used to doing in English Studies

or any other subject, turned out to be an eye-opener on literary analysis and its effects.

Another learning experience that the students mention is that the teaching unit offered insight into new material, multimodal texts and text universes, and a method for working with this new material. As such, the teaching unit functions as '[i]nspiration as to how I can use text universes in a classroom situation', Student 14 explains. Other students also see the potential of working with the material of a text universe in their future roles as teachers: 'Working with text universes is more interesting, and it's something that I'll bring with me when teaching' (Student 5). In addition, the teaching material and method are a 'very good example of an activity that will be extremely useful as a teacher at upper secondary school!' (Student 9). Besides being considered a useful example, the teaching unit also offers motivation: 'This is so motivating and definitely something that must be used in our education in schools' (Student 12). In this way, the teaching unit provided the students with a teaching model that they themselves can use in their future careers as English teachers.

Addressing the what and how of literary studies in English
This article considers the digital reform in contemporary society and the consequent need for schools to meet the new demands through, for example, multimodality (Kress & van Leeuwen 2001) and creativity (Craft 2005), that arise in the wake of this reform in Sweden, as well as in the other Nordic countries. The article has presented a teaching unit applied in a teacher programme in English for upper secondary school that aims to prepare future teachers to teach literature in an increasingly digitalised setting in which multimodality and creativity are central concepts. It clearly challenges the participating students in terms of working with a *teaching material* that is unfamiliar to them in an educational context and in terms of working with a *teaching method*—creative learning in combination with literary production—with which they are also unfamiliar. As a result, this article functions as an example of shared practice and argues for an innovative type of course design with the potential to strengthen students' engagement in, and their self-assessed understanding of, literary texts, and in turn, to inspire them as future English teachers to try out similar approaches in their own teaching practice.

The teaching unit proved to be a positive experience for the participating students as it provided them with a deeper understanding of the process of storytelling, a more developed understanding of the analysis process, and a more satisfying engagement with literary texts in various media formats. Another positive aspect is that they learned much about themselves and about their peers—a (re-)discovery of one's own and others' creativity through partaking in their creative processes, and from enjoying their creative productions. Although they felt initially that it would be difficult to activate their own creativity, with guidance from the teacher they found it fun and engaging.

The teaching unit, focusing on creative learning, placed student autonomy and student responsibility in the foreground. The students were asked to decide, in groups, which text universe to work with, which re-presentations to use, and which aspect to focus on. In addition, they were asked to create a story, a re-presentation, that would add to the text universe in question, and they were free to choose which text and media format they were going to use. In this way, they were given autonomy in their assignment (Linge 2012), something that most students found liberating. The demand on teachers to give the students increased autonomy is crucial when educating for creativity, Linge (2012) claims. Thus, the design of the teaching unit makes it possible to enhance the students' creativity instead of hindering the creative process, which most re-productive work does (Vygotsky 2004).

In addition to student autonomy, the participating students discovered more of their creative potential, of what they can do, which is one reason why it is important to educate for creativity (Linge 2012). Though sometimes challenging, the discovery of their own and other's creative potential contributed to experiencing the most intense lesson, as one student described it.

An important outcome of the study is that the students found it fruitful, fun, and engaging to create stories, re-presentations, which most of them were unfamiliar with in a recreational context, and even more so in an educational context. Literary production is, according to Vygotsky (2004), a stage in the human development required for expressing complex thoughts and relationships. This development is particularly important during adolescence, as the phase of puberty can be seen as a turning point at which there is surge in new emotions (Vygotsky 2004). As such, literary production functions as a means to make sense of the world and one's

place in it, and in particular, to develop various forms of expression that facilitate these meaning-making processes. Accordingly, literary production can be a useful tool for learning at the upper secondary level. This study suggests that this innovative course design, taking literary production into consideration, can be a significant element in the teacher education as it has the potential to prepare the English teachers of tomorrow to guide teenagers in developing complex thoughts as well as making sense of the world and their place in it through literary studies.

Besides the initial challenge of employing one's creativity, another challenge identified by the participating students was the limited time frame for the teaching unit. Some students explained that they would have liked more time to make more complex or better developed re-presentations of higher quality. This answer about the limited time frame draws attention to a challenge for teachers and teacher educators alike, namely the challenge of planning a teaching unit for working with creative learning, which is particularly difficult, since it is not possible to foresee how much time students will need to produce a re-presentation. While some students may use a long period of time to create a complex re-presentation, others may only use part of it to create a basic re-presentation and spend the rest of the time doing something else. Student autonomy and responsibility are challenges for teachers, but it is important that such challenges do not hinder developing students' creative processes.

By focusing on the aesthetic dimension of literary studies as developed through creative learning and literary production, the teaching unit uses and strengthens the view of literary studies not only as a vital part of a language subject, but also as an aesthetic subject in which aesthetic values are considered and appreciated. In Sweden, students who are training to become upper secondary school teachers in English learn about language teaching and learning with a focus on EFL, and they also learn how to teach their pupils linguistic competencies, for example, reading, writing, speaking and listening skills. However, it is equally important that they learn how to teach their pupils aesthetic values by working with fictional texts in a broad sense. In addition to focusing on learning to read, understand, interpret, analyse, and critically engage with fictional texts, another key element of the teacher education is to prepare the students for working not only with a variety of fictional texts, including digital and multimodal texts, but also with creative learning and literary production – hence focusing on aesthetic dimensions of literary studies.

The on-going digitalisation process in Swedish schools is a reflection of the digitalisation process in society at large, a society influenced by the screen culture, in which the digital screen is the primary medium for communication. In this screen culture, young people learn English via digital tools, websites, for example YouTube, and social media. They also spend much time using fictional stories, especially multimodal stories through TV series, films, and computer games (Lundström & Svensson 2017b). Since most of these stories are in English, they learn English in an informal context. Addressing the *what* of literary studies in English in higher education with a focus on teacher education, it is clear that the material used in the teaching unit relates to the digital trend in society by incorporating multimodal texts—TV series, films, and computer games— and thereby challenging traditional teaching materials that focus predominantly on typographic texts, a challenge that the participating students found inspiring and stimulating.

In a rapidly changing society, there is a need to educate citizens to be flexible (Robinson 2011) and creative (Craft 2005). This becomes evident when looking at the current syllabus for upper secondary school in Sweden where the ability to find and use new knowledge is considered vital. It is equally important to foster the students' creativity and curiosity as well as strengthen their abilities to apply ideas and solve problems (The Swedish National Agency for Education 2013). As can be seen in the replies, the participating students claim that their analytical and their creative competencies were developed. In this way, literary studies lend themselves to creative learning and creative development in a fruitful way. Consequently, it is significant to inform teacher students how to apply generic competences, such as creative learning, in their future work as teachers as a means to develop linguistic, literary, and analytical competencies. Addressing the *how* of literary studies in English, the presented teaching unit offers a method that focuses on creative learning— an aspect that Craft (2005) and Linge (2012) claim is crucial for today's society and schools—and on literary production in which the students are instructed to create literary contributions, cross-medial remakes or transmedial makeovers, of a selected text universe. The participating students explained that they needed to analyse the source text and the various re-presentations thoroughly in order to be able to create such a re-presentation (cf. Svensson & Haglind 2020). Through the teaching unit,

students can develop their analytical competence, and, more importantly, gain insight into why analytical competence is important.

The teaching unit provides the students with a model that addresses the *what* and the *how* of literature teaching and learning, a model that they themselves want to use expressively in their future careers as English teachers at the upper secondary level. As such, the teaching unit can be seen as a case of learning by doing, that is, based on their own experiences of working with the model, the students know what is possible to learn from it, and thereby why and how they might use it in the future. It is important that universities educate not only for today's but also for tomorrow's classrooms and societies. The teaching unit applied in this study functions as a model that meets the challenges of teaching English literature in a digital society, in particular regarding multimodality and creativity, as it focuses on the aesthetic dimensions of literary studies.

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