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Journal of Literary Education

Editorial

Empirical Research in Reading and Literary Education

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The empirical studies on literary education and/or literary reading have often been situated on the margins of academia. The presumption of literature as an inexhaustible knowledge has distanced this type of research from the academic sphere, although in recent decades, novel approaches have emerged that have revitalized the discipline.

The seventh issue of the Journal of Literary Education focuses on 'Empirical Research in Reading and Literary Education,' as articulated in its CFP, which posed the challenge of publishing a set of contributions that not only consider the scientific nature of literary studies but, even more importantly, they also highlight the need to gather evidence from actual observation in the classroom about how literature might be read ,taught or appropriated in schools. How and in what ways individual actual readers reflect on a literary work? How they might shape their interpretations of literature and how they negotiate meaning? In what ways they -as R.E. Probst in his seminal work (Probst 2004) points out- discussion is conducted inside the interpretative community

of the classroom and how individual readers respond to literary texts differently and at the same time carefully and thoughtfully?

The interest in empirical research in Literary Education arises from the observation of the relatively low number of publications in disciplines such as Psychology, Linguistics, or Educational Studies that rigorously examine, from an empirical standpoint, how individuals read, comprehend, share, and/or enjoy literary works of different genres, understood in uppercase letters. For instance, in an influential meta-analysis (Delgado et al., 2018) comparing the effect of reading on paper versus digital reading on reading comprehension, the authors concluded that there was a clear advantage of paper reading over digital reading for expository texts and no effect for narrative texts. However, the authors emphasized the need to expand research with narrative texts since the majority of studies included in the meta-analysis used expository passages (14% vs. 67%). In many cases where narrative texts are included in psychological research, they tend to be short passages extracted from longer works (as in the case of the Harry Potter series) and/or created ad-hoc by the researchers, ensuring experimental rigor but possibly limiting the literary authenticity and quality of the texts (Gómez-Merino et al., 2022; Troyer & Kutas, 2020).

From a philological perspective, however, we find corpus analyses of literary texts or careful adaptations of classic works of such significance as the *Bible* or *Don Quixote* (see the interesting proposal of the UAM Easy Reading team) for children or adult learners of second languages or those with reading difficulties, whose impact on comprehension or learning is not empirically analysed by systematically and controllably observing the reader from a cognitive or human learning model (Arfé et al., 2018).

Empirical studies about literary reading cover many areas and methodologies: from neuropsychological studies on the reception of metaphors (Schnitzer & Pedreira, 2005) to the measurement of Literary Competence (Mínguez-López & Alfonso-Benlliure, 2021), the analysis of the very core of literariness (Miall & Kuiken, 2013; Salgado, 2015), and the inclusion of different studies with one point in common: the aim to use empirical methods and materials to check assumed statements on how to "teach" literature.

With this background, the seventh issue of the *Journal of Literary Education* has sought to compose a monograph with contributions from disciplinary perspectives (psychological, developmental, transcultural, cognitive, linguistic, and educational) to deepen our understanding of literature, literary processes, literary applications, and the notion of empirical research within the framework of literary education.

In the same vein, this particular focused issue of JLE aims to become a forum for interdisciplinary research, encouraging researchers, professors, and educators to exchange knowledge and collaborate in the field of empirical literary research.

We open this issue with the study by Jana Segi Lukavská and Anežka Kuzmičová on the inner states of characters in Children's Literature anthologies and its use in classrooms in 'Polarised Worlds: Female and Male Inner States in Children's Reading Anthologies'

Anastasiya Andrianova analyses in 'Low-stakes reflections on learning as a tool for teaching theory through children's books' the role of children's literature for teaching literary theory at the university level.

Panagyota Miké introduce the "Critical Thinking Skills Evaluation Tool" (C.T.S.E.T.) to assess critical thinking with picturebooks in First grade students in 'Assessing children's critical thinking through the "Critical Thinking Skills Evaluation Tool" (C.T.S.E.T.)'.

In 'Understanding and Text Properties: Investigating Readers' Sense-making Processes', Leonie Kirchhoff and Judith Glaesser delve into students' approaches to difficult texts (Shakespeare sonnets) and the more challenging literary phenomena they have to confront.

'Innovative Pedagogical Strategies to Motivate Reading in Young People with Intellectual Disabilities: Presentation of an Experience,' an article written by Vicenta Ávila and Laura Gil, showcases the word-cloud activity as a fruitful way to encourage reading with intellectual disabilities.

Olle Nordberg and Anna Lyngfelt, in 'The students expect to read non-fiction, so that's what they're set on' – or are they? Educational perspectives on 413 middle school students' reading, analyse responses to subjects such as vulnerability and racism and

the possibilities of literary texts for engaging students in reading and current social debate.

To conclude the monographic section, Yasemin Yilmaz Yuksek presents 'Reading Literary Texts with an Ecocritical Consciousness in the Anthropocene' where she questions the effect of guided reading on students' comprehension of the reading material and compares their initial responses to the texts with those given after the lecture.

The miscellaneous section is opened by Niyati Gangwar with the article 'Ideological Engagement in a Colonial Society: A Case Study of Premchand's Children's Literature'. She analyses ideology in works of a popular Indian author as a way to face British colonialism.

Maretta Sidiropoulou in 'Reading and Space: Unveiling Dynamic Interactions' explores the ways in which Greek urban middle-class individuals defined as readers engage with and navigate social and cultural spaces, emphasizing the agency and creativity in their reading practices.

Finally, Maria Botella-Martinez and Rebeca Cristina López-González analyse how the introduction of intercultural cinema as a pedagogical tool enhances students' communication, cooperative skills, and motivation in 'Intercultural Cinema to Foster Education for Sustainable Development and Global Citizenship: a Didactic Case Study'.

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Polarised Worlds: Female and Male Inner States in Children's Reading Anthologies

Mundos polarizados: estados internos masculinos y femeninos en antologías de lecturas infantiles

Móns Polaritzats: Estats Internors Femenins i Masculins a les Antologies de Lectura Infantils

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Abstract

Experts on literature and pedagogy from a wide range of countries and traditions currently argue for including literary texts with diverse characters in the curriculum, in order to provide children with varied reading experiences and foster their outgroup empathy skills. In this article, our aim is twofold. Firstly, we contribute to the debate in question by examining how the inner states (emotions and cognition) of female and male characters are portrayed in a purposeful sample of 44 prose excerpts from Czech Year 3 reading anthologies. Secondly, we present an innovative procedure for analysing texts that allows for the exploration of a selection of literary texts as individual entities and at the same time their analysis as an aggregate whole. Our analyses show that female characters' inner states tend to be underrepresented, especially regarding cognition. While we have not found significant differences in the overall quality of female characters' inner states in comparison to their male counterparts, individual excerpts tend to strongly highlight the inner states of female or male characters, respectively, thus creating story worlds with a distinct female-vs-male orientation.

Keywords: software-assisted literary analysis, emotion, cognition, gender, reading anthologies

Resumen

Expertos literarios y educativos de diferentes países y tradiciones argumentan actualmente a favor de incluir textos literarios con personajes diversos en la enseñanza, con el fin de proporcionar a los niños y niñas experiencias de lectura variadas y fomentar sus habilidades de empatía hacia aquellos que son diferentes a ellos. En este artículo nuestro objetivo es doble. En primer lugar, contribuimos al debate en cuestión examinando cómo se representan los estados internos (emociones y cognición)

de los personajes femeninos y masculinos en una muestra cuidadosamente seleccionada de 44 fragmentos en prosa de antologías de lectura del tercer año de Educación Primaria en la República Checa. En segundo lugar, presentamos un procedimiento innovador de análisis de texto que permite explorar una selección de textos literarios como entidades individuales, pero también su análisis como un conjunto global. Nuestros análisis muestran que los estados internos de los personajes femeninos tienden a estar subrepresentados, especialmente en lo que respecta a la cognición. No hemos encontrado diferencias significativas en la calidad general de los estados internos de los personajes femeninos en comparación con los masculinos; sin embargo, los fragmentos individuales tienden a resaltar fuertemente los estados internos de personajes femeninos o masculinos respectivamente, creando así mundos narrativos distintos centrados en lo femenino o lo masculino.

Palabras clave: análisis literario asistido por software, emoción, cognición, género, antologías de lectura.

Resum

Experts literaris i educatius de diferents països i tradicions argumenten actualment a favor d'incloure textos literaris amb personatges diversos en l'ensenyament, amb la finalitat de proporcionar els infants experiències de lectura variades i fomentar les seues habilitats d'empatia cap als que en són diferents. En aquest article el nostre objectiu és doble. En primer lloc, contribuïm al debat en qüestió tot examinant com es representen els estats interns (emocions i cognició) dels personatges femenins i masculins en una mostra acuradament seleccionada de 44 fragments en prosa d'antologies de lectura del tercer any d'Educació Primària a la República Txeca. En segon lloc, presentem un procediment innovador d'anàlisi de text que permet explorar una selecció de textos literaris com a entitats individuals, però també la seua anàlisi com un conjunt global. Les nostres anàlisis mostren que els estats interns dels personatges femenins tendeixen a estar subrepresentats, especialment en allò que respecta a la cognició. No hem trobat diferències significatives en la qualitat general dels estats interns dels personatges femenins en comparació amb els masculins; tanmateix, els fragments individuals tendeixen a ressaltar fortament els estats interns de personatges femenins o masculins respectivament, tot creant així mons narratius distints centrats en allò femení o allò masculí.

Paraules clau: anàlisi literària assistida per software, emoció, cognició, gènere, antologies de lectura

1. Introduction

Introducing children to diversity through fictional texts has become one of the imperatives for literature teachers, librarians, and other practitioners today. Encountering texts with characters of varied background and gender is supposed to provide different readers with the opportunity to empathise with characters similar to them (using texts as 'mirrors'), or enable them to face new situations and look at them from a different angle (using texts as 'windows'), and thus enhance their empathy in the longer term (Bishop, 1990; Kucirkova, 2019). In the last decades, abundant literature has been published concerning the underrepresentation of specific character – including female – types in literary texts (Biemmi, 2012; Casey et al., 2021; Crisp and Hiller, 2011; Hamilton et al., 2006). The data convincingly shows that while girls lack the kind of reading material that might serve as 'mirrors', boys are deprived of certain kinds of 'windows'.

We can distinguish between quantitative and qualitative approaches to this issue. The quantitative approach examines *whether* there are certain types of characters present in literary texts (male, female, non-binary), and if so, *in what proportions* (Clark et al, 2003; Weitzmann et al., 1972; Kraicer and Piper, 2019). Qualitative approaches look more closely into the context of character rendition, e.g., with a focus on issues of diversity and/or stereotyping in children's literature (Forni, 2020) and non-literary texts used in educational settings (Biemmi, 2012). While quantitative methods may enable us to work with large amounts of text data and help us identify places of imbalance or observe trends in character representation, they are insufficient in describing the quality of different voices. Therefore, Clark (2002) calls for the inclusion of more nuanced, qualitative approaches when addressing the issue. Indeed, quantitative studies have more recently begun to adopt a more qualitative point of view, asking *how* certain types of characters are portrayed in texts, e.g., in terms of their centrality in the story (Casey et al., 2021), the portrayal of their emotions (Tepper and Cassidy, 1999) or through what stylistic features they are portrayed (Burke & Coats, 2022).

In this article, we join the debate on the representation of male and female characters in narratives for children, taking a rather qualitative perspective which is nevertheless informed by an earlier quantitative study (Authors, 2022). Assuming that, in order for a reader to 'read the mind' of a character and thus stimulate empathy skills, it is necessary that the character is shown to think or feel, we examine female and male characters' inner states (emotions and cognition). As we demonstrate below, even texts which feature both male and female characters can differ vastly in the depth and variety of portrayed inner states.

Our purposeful sample of texts ($N = 44$) consists of narratives included in reading anthologies

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(*čítanky*): textbooks compiling literary text excerpts of different lengths, genres, and styles, and by various authors from different historical periods. These anthologies are widely used in Czech primary schools to foster children's reading skills but also to teach children, starting at a very young age, about quality literary texts. Working with a middle-size, diverse set of

literary texts, we also suggest possible ways of mapping inner state representation while optimising literary research through software-assisted analysis.

While the results of our text analyses may be of special relevance in educational research and teaching for diversity, we hope that the description of our intuitive and easily adaptable

methodology will be of use to researchers beyond the field of education, e.g. literary scholars conducting targeted studies of edited collections, whether single- or multi-authored.

In the following sections, we first introduce our workflow as well as the benefits and challenges of software-assisted analysis on the example of our text data. We then present the results of analysis, focusing on texts in terms of their tendency to inhabit the narratives predominantly through the emotions and cognitive states of either male or female characters (thus making them *gender-polarised*). Finally, to provide another glimpse into the procedure, we include a case study of two polarised excerpts from our sample.

2. Methodology

The study presented in this article is part of a larger project exploring how characters' inner states are represented in Czech reading anthologies for Year 3 pupils. Wishing to grasp the corpus of 530 text excerpts as a whole while also paying attention to the particular characteristics of individual texts, we chose to combine 'distant' (whole-text, corpus-wide) and 'close' (in-text) methods in a two-step approach. This proved fruitful during the first phase of the project, in which we focused on the presence/absence and potential complexity of inner states as experienced by characters of four different types: female, male, animal, and other. Working with all narratives on the whole-text level, we observed striking imbalances in the representation of male and female characters throughout the corpus. Still, we were able to interpret and calibrate the findings only after a closer look at each text (Authors, 2022).

The current article describes the process of in-text analysis in the case of 44 individual excerpts in a purposeful sample of texts. To explain how this sample was created, we must briefly outline some of the preceding steps. After digitising the anthologies, we selected all texts with narrative structure. Both authors of the present article then proceeded to read through these texts, assigning codes in such categories as author, publication period, point of view, and word count. Trying to get an idea of what the anthologies offer to children in terms of the portrayal of inner psychological states, we further coded among three different instances (bodily engagement, emotions, and cognition) as these pertained to four different types of characters (female, male, animal, and other). For those which did portray such inner states (any of the four instances), we further discriminated between less and more complex experience dimensions on a binary scale, with the aim of better understanding the depth with which characters were portrayed. Following Kukkonen's (2019) suggestion that character's active bodily engagement prompts a deeper sense of reader-character connection, we distinguished between characters who merely

observe events and those who play a more physically active role in the story. We further distinguished between primary and secondary emotions (Evans, 2001; Nikolajeva, 2013), trying to map whether the different types of characters tend to be ascribed basic emotions (such as fear) or whether they develop more complex emotions (such as guilt). Within cognitive states, we coded for lower- and higher-order cognition, based on Zunshine's (2006) concept of levels of intentionality. Our aim was to find out whether the characters orientate their thoughts strictly to themselves or whether they employ higher levels of mentalisation skills, such as thinking about the motivations of others.

In our previous research, cognitive and emotional states proved to vary much more widely across character types than bodily engagement, hence we established the text sample based on cognition and emotion. Having previously discovered that longer texts consistently featured more complex representations of characters' inner states, we chose only among excerpts above median word length (490+ words; $N = 267$). Aiming for a maximally balanced text sample, we selected 44 texts, corresponding to 16.5% of all longer excerpts. We primarily picked texts that had been coded as representing both male and female (complex) characters. To ensure the diversity of the sample, texts were selected from as many anthologies as possible, with diverse representation in terms of author gender (both male and female), provenance (Czech works and foreign works in translation), and historical period (19th to 21st century). We further strived to prioritise texts written by the most frequently represented authors.

Having established our sample, we looked for a tool that would help us identify emotional and cognitive states in the texts, assign codes to the individual inner-state instances, and explore potential links between them. With regard to the size of our text sample, we opted for software-assisted annotation, namely Atlas.ti 8. Our choice was informed by rather general comparisons of the software options such as Paulus and Lester (2020), as well as Kimmel (2008, 2012), whose articles based on Atlas.ti annotation blazed the trail for software-assisted work in literary studies. To date, software-assisted analysis remains somewhat neglected in this field and is mainly limited to the thematic analysis of reader response (Swann and Allington, 2009; Fernandez-Quintanilla, 2020). Atlas.ti was chosen since it provides an intuitive user interface, visual aids useful for analysis (e.g. colour-coding – see Figures below), and flexible solutions for the coding procedure, such as grouping and re-grouping of the individual codes. It also offers features for easily sharing and exporting data into formats suitable for simple quantitative analysis, as well as communicating with other researchers within the scope of the software, all of which proved to be an added convenience for collaborative work.

Setting up the project in Atlas.ti, we uploaded all excerpts in .txt format and then created a separate *Document group* – our text sample. During the preparation phase, we carefully considered what types of codes, and at what level of abstraction, to select for in relation to our objectives, being aware that code selection represents the first phase of interpretation. After this preparatory work, we proceeded to a recursive process of reading the texts, creating *quotations* (i.e. text highlights available for later retrieval and analysis), and evaluating the interim progress. We read and re-read the individual texts multiple times, on the suggestion of Kimmel (2012), who argues that the time spent on repeated multiphase reading is compensated by improved workflow and methodological precision. Each new reading compelled us to consider the data in a slightly new light, and thus re-evaluate the established quotations and codes assigned to them.

Starting with the annotation procedure, we built upon previous research and coded for inner states (emotions and cognition) on two levels of complexity (lower- and higher-order cognition, primary and secondary emotions) as well as differentiating between four types of characters (male, female, animal, other). Recording all emotional/cognitive instances, we aimed to get a nuanced, in-depth understanding of the quality of the depicted cognitive and emotional states, but also a more precise idea of the respective centrality of different character types or even individual characters. We define ‘emotional/cognitive instance’ as the depiction of a specific emotional or cognitive state, no matter how extensive as measured in word count. Let us consider Fig. 1 as an example:

The figure displays a text analysis interface. On the left, a literary excerpt is shown with brackets marking individual quotations. On the right, a list of codes assigned to these quotations is displayed. The codes are organized into groups, each with a label indicating the quotation's position in the text (e.g., 5:1, 5:3, 5:4).

Quotation Label	Assigned Codes
5:1 hides hi... 5...	emo M implied, emo M in body, emo M2, cog M2
5:3...	cog M1
5:4 l... 5:5 l...	emo M implied, emo M1, paraverbal, emo M in body

Figure 1. Passage from the excerpt *A Bullied Boy* by Alena Ježková in *Document manager*. The left side shows the literary excerpt with marked borders between the individual quotations. The right side panel captures the codes assigned to the quotations.

In Fig. 1, the text indicates through multiple means that the bullied boy might feel ashamed, vulnerable, humiliated, or sad: he avoids eye contact (EMO M IN BODY) and rushes away from

his saviour, the first-person narrator. The whole first sentence is nevertheless tagged as a single emotional instance, representing one (however complex) emotional state (EMO M2), 'M' signifying the character's male gender and '2' the level of the respective instance (secondary emotion). The implicitness/explicitness (EMO M IMPLIED) of inner states was another dimension we coded for, since empirical data suggest that this makes a difference in children's reception of texts and their potential development of empathy (Peskin and Astington, 2004).

Later in the excerpt, the narrator expresses astonishment in two different ways: first when he whistles, and later, with a prolonged interjection. Again, we understand such cases as only one instance of EMO M1 (primary emotion experienced by a male character). Yet we further differentiate on another level between the various ways an excerpt may express emotions, e.g. coding the narrator's whistling as EMO M IN BODY.

In fact the embodiment of inner states is one of the key dimensions we decided to consider in the annotation. We presumed bodily experience would represent one of the important qualities of characters' inner states, and wanted to examine whether embodiment differed between male and female characters, as research suggests (Čermáková and Mahlberg, 2022). Our preliminary examination of the texts also indicated that characters' bodies play a crucial role in manifesting various inner states, especially implicit ones. Coding bodily expressions as emotional instances, we relied on general works on non-verbal communication (Argyle, 2013; Givens, 2002).

During the process of reading, we came up with several additional codes on an ad hoc basis. Proceeding bottom-up, we tried to grasp recurring situations portraying inner states that either escaped other code dimensions or represented a specific case of a repeatedly occurring inner state. As an example of the former, we created the code NARRATOR. We used this code to capture passages in which a non-personal (typically intrusive) narrator manifests inner states. With regard to the latter, we created the PARAVERBAL code (see Fig. 1) for marking those passages in which a character expresses emotion through the volume, speed, or voice pitch. to check for potential differences between male and female characters.

The partly inductive nature of our procedure resulted in some dead ends. For instance, during the initial annotation phase, it seemed important to differentiate between the ANTICIPATION of future events and active PLANNING. We therefore created two separate codes to grasp this difference. However, after going through the entire sample, these two codes turned out quite often to be barely discernible, compelling us to merge the two codes into one (ANTICIPATION; see Fig. 5 to find an example of PLANNING replaced with ANTICIPATION). Working with a diverse sample of texts, representing a great diversity of styles, such situations are inevitable. What

appears as crucial in one text is often completely absent in others. We ended up with 52 codes in total – a relatively low number (cf. Friese, 2019), but one that was sufficient for our purposes.

The annotation process presented various challenges. Especially when tracking for emotions, it is difficult to decide whether a passage captures a single complex emotional instance or several separate instances, or else, in cases of implicitly expressed emotions, whether a passage portrays any emotion at all (cf. ‘the boy [...] finally looks at me’ in Fig. 1 which may indicate the emergence of positive emotions between the two characters). In cases of doubt, *Comments* in Atlas.ti provided a good tool to tag the ambiguous cases that we wanted to return to later, for further discussion and assessment (using *Memos*). The two examples of emotional instances illustrated by Fig. 1 above also indicate another of the challenges we faced. The implied emotions are often depicted in an ambiguous way, making it difficult to draw a line between primary and secondary emotions. While whistling might be considered a conventional way to describe astonishment (a primary emotion), avoiding eye contact may refer to various emotions, primary (e.g. sadness, fear) and secondary (e.g. feelings of humiliation, shame). For instances like this, it was usually possible to differentiate by looking at the wider context.

With quotations, we have given significant thought to the ideal length at which to tag segments of text, especially in the case of authors who tend towards repetition (e.g. David Walliams), often yielding paragraph-length sections conveying a single inner-state instance. In such cases, we tried to stay flexible, tagging the passages in full to include all relevant data, and stratifying segments, when needed, by assigning new codes from other semantic domains.

We continually carried out qualitative data processing directly in Atlas.ti, making use of the *Query Tool*, *Code-Document Table*, and *Code Co-occurrence Table*. The *Query Tool* provided an efficient way to show the links (‘proximity’) of various codes while applying particular (e.g. Boolean) operators, and also made searches for particular examples, where necessary, exceedingly simple (in the case, for example, of exploring quotations representing male characters crying, or characters experiencing an emotional *and* cognitive state at the same time).

To examine the frequency of selected codes and code groups in the sample as a whole, and especially in various subsamples, the *Code-Document Table* was particularly valuable. Table 1 shows an example of a subsample, comprising information about two texts we analyse in the Case studies section of this article. A look at the *Code-Document Table* enables a quick *intratextual* comparison of the differences between representations of male and female emotional/cognitive instances, and an *intertextual* comparison of the number of quotations linked to the selected code groups.

Document Manager		Code-Document Table	
Search Codes		284: NN01_Březin...	343: NP07_Lindgren...
Name		37	31
<input type="checkbox"/>	anticipation		
<input type="checkbox"/>	appel		
<input type="checkbox"/>	cognition 1		
<input type="checkbox"/>	cognition 1 A		
<input type="checkbox"/>	cognition 1 F		
<input type="checkbox"/>	cognition 1 M		
<input type="checkbox"/>	cognition 1 O		
<input type="checkbox"/>	cognition 2		
	cognition F	261	12
	cognition M	458	4
	emotion F	216	11
	emotion M	334	7
	Totals	36	34

Table 1. Code-Document table in Atlas.ti capturing the number of male (M) and female (F) emotional and cognitive instances in *A Boy and His Dog* (284: NN01) and *Pippi Longstocking* (343: NP07).

Furthermore, by clicking on the respective fields of the Atlas.ti *Code-Document Table*, we were able to display the underlying quotations and get a synchronous view of the different inner states depicted in sample texts. Conversely, by clicking on a quotation, we could enter the *Documents section* to see the respective quotation in its context. In this sense, it is possible to work with the text in a manner similar to traditional literary analysis, but with the help of a digital tool that allows for quicker orientation in a given excerpt, so that one may readily find passages with a higher density of coded instances, or to distinguish between them based on colour coding, as shown in the Figures below.

The *Code Co-occurrence Tables* show the *proximity* of selected codes, i.e. how frequently some codes co-occur, as expressed by the c-coefficient (co-occurrence coefficient). This tool thus enables an efficient comparison of the strength of relationships between selected codes – considering the nature of our research, very often in gender-specific sets (cf. Table 2 in the Results section below).

Additionally, to run quantitative procedures, we converted the data capturing the numbers of types of emotional/cognitive instances acquired through *Code-Document Tables* into Excel sheets, creating an extended version of our tables used in the previous, whole-text study (Authors, 2022), and in this way facilitating comparisons of the data obtained during the two consecutive steps. Then, we processed the data by applying basic descriptive statistics. Having analysed the results obtained through quantitative procedures, we came back to the software-assisted analysis, searching for meaningful ways to interpret data using the tools mentioned above.

3. Results

In this section, we first present the results obtained through quantitative analysis, followed by the results of our qualitative analysis of the emotional and cognitive states of male and female characters. With the quantitative approach, we examined the quantity of emotional/cognitive instances in the entire sample, with an eye to the results of our effort to gather texts which include both complex male and female characters.

In spite of this effort, our annotation procedure showed that female characters were portrayed with fewer emotional and cognitive instances in the text sample as a whole. In brief, we were able to identify significantly fewer female cognitive and emotional instances ($N = 480$) than those associated with their male counterparts ($N = 790$). This disproportion manifests itself across different types of instances (lower- and higher-order, implicit, and explicit).

Based on our sample, we calculate 1.5x more male ($N = 332$) than female ($N = 219$) emotional instances. With respect to the portrayal of cognitive processes, the gender gap is even more pronounced, with 1.75x more male ($N = 458$) than female ($N = 261$) cognitive instances. These disproportions seem to mirror the results previously reported in Authors, 2022, which finds that, from a corpus-wide and whole-text sampling of the same literary anthologies, female characters' inner states are underrepresented in comparison to their male counterparts.

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Zooming in on individual excerpts from our sample, we often find that one gender dominates with respect to the number of emotional and cognitive instances. The number of these instances typically skews towards one gender or the other at ratios ranging widely from 0.02 to 12.5. These ratios seem to reflect the amount of attention paid to certain types of characters (cf. Woloch, 2003). In the most disproportionate texts, a male protagonist (or a group of boys) was accompanied by a lone and less significant female character (typically a mother or teacher), or else, conversely, a leading female character or characters by a male character. In this article, we use the term 'gender-polarised' to refer to those texts which show a significant disproportion in terms of the number of male and female inner-state instances. We mean this strictly with respect to the disproportionate representation of emotional/cognitive instances in the portrayal of male and female characters in individual texts; our use of the term *polarisation* should not be confused with 'gender polarisation' as described by Bem (1993), i.e. the tendency to describe femininity and masculinity as opposites.

Notably, all but four texts from our sample turned out to be *gender-polarised*. In the four exceptions, the ratio of female to male instances ranged between 0.7 and 1.3, showing the scarcity of texts in which male and female characters are portrayed with roughly the same depth and variety of inner states. Such texts, furthermore, tend to feature characters appearing in gender-opposite pairs (emperor and empress, sister and brother). Yet even in these exceptions, where the number of experiential instances is more balanced, there are considerable differences in the way female and male characters are portrayed. Female characters are depicted as predominantly emotional (58% of all female instances); this is not the case, however, with their male counterparts (46% of all male instances).

Of the 40 polarised texts, 13 are female-centred and 27 male-centred. Quantitative analysis shows that the female-centred group as a whole tends to depict the emotional and cognitive states of female and male characters with more balance overall: the emotional instances in this group account for 40% of all female instances and 41% of all male instances. In the male-centred group, by contrast, descriptions of the emotional state of female characters make up 52% of all instances, in comparison to 42% in the case of their male counterparts. This shows that the ratio of male emotional and cognitive instances remains roughly the same throughout the sample, with male characters being more 'rational' than 'emotional'. The portrayal of female characters, on the other hand, tends to vary more widely between emotional or cognitive instances. However, with the exception of the female-centred group, female characters tend to be portrayed through their emotions more frequently than through their cognitive states.

Examining cognitive instances in terms of their complexity throughout the whole sample, lower-order cognitive instances are portrayed 1.7x more frequently than higher-order ones. The explanation seems obvious: characters more frequently think about their own situation, without considering the inner states of other characters. Higher-order cognitive instances typically appear later in a narrative, as lower-order instances build and characters' perspectives shift from their own experiences to those of others (cf. Figures in the 'Case Studies' section below). Notably, the difference between the disproportion of lower-order to higher-order cognitive instances in female characters is less pronounced than in their male counterparts: the ratio (lower- to higher-order) for female characters is 1.4; with male characters it is 1.9. Two mutually non-exclusive explanations can be applied to this observation.

Firstly, in several female-centred texts where female higher-order cognition instances dominate, female characters are featured in realistic settings (such as school), describing everyday social challenges, and interpreting the feelings of others. By contrast, in the case of male-centred texts which portray male characters in similarly realistic settings and with a similarly high number of

cognitive instances, this portrayal tends to involve little adventures or harmless mischief, focusing on plot rather than relationships among characters. Secondly, looking at those texts in which the portrayal of lower-order cognitive states is most disproportionate, we found several excerpts in our sample of male-centred adventures in which a male (boy) protagonist or protagonists are entirely absorbed in the present moment, without a thought for anything or anybody else; we found no examples of the adventure genre among the female-centred texts.

The prominent orientation of female characters towards others in the whole corpus is also indicated in a corpus linguistic study by Hejnišová, 2022. Carried out on selected verbs of thinking (for example, *to know*), what this study shows is that female characters are more frequently portrayed than their male counterparts as possessing knowledge about others. This can be interpreted as one of the indications that female characters are stereotyped as more caring and nurturing (Hamilton et al., 2006), and thus more prone to thinking about the needs of others.

Turning now to emotions, we found that primary emotional instances are portrayed 2x more frequently than secondary emotions. Similarly to higher-order cognitive instances, we observe that secondary emotions tend to occur later in a narrative, as a kind of superstructure developed while the characters gain depth. Analysis shows that female characters are portrayed with 2,5x more primary emotional instances than secondary ones. By comparison, male characters' primary emotional instances appear only 1,8x more frequently than secondary emotions. Notably, a higher ratio of female primary emotional instances in comparison to secondary emotional instances is depicted in female-centred texts. In this subsample, female characters are portrayed with 3,6x more primary emotions than secondary emotions. Looking more closely at the subsample, the highest ratio of primary emotions to secondary emotions appears in texts that are exceedingly rich in cognitive instances. Presumably, female protagonists in these texts are more likely to consider the thoughts and emotions of others than to experience complex emotions themselves.

In the last paragraphs of this section, we dispense with the quantitative study of polarised texts to take a closer look at the individual portrayal of female and male characters, with an eye to the *quality* of various cognitive and emotional codes. To grasp the specific qualities of male and female emotional/cognitive states, we focus on three distinct qualities: complexity (which we already commented on above), embodiment, and implicitness/explicitness. From this perspective, the differences in the portrayal of emotional and cognitive states for female and male characters proved to be generally subtle throughout our sample. In the next paragraphs,

we present some (though not all) of the differences found during the processing of the data with Atlas.ti tools.

Firstly, let us have a look at the most frequent types of codes describing cognitive instances: ANTICIPATION, REMEMBERING, and SPECULATION, see Table 2. When first processing our sample, we assumed that the portrayal of male characters would emphasize their thoughts about past and future, and speculation about various possibilities, while the portrayal of their female counterparts would emphasize a tendency to 'live in the moment'. However, this assumption was confirmed only in part. Considering the relative frequencies given by the c-coefficient (where 0 means the two given codes never co-occur and 1 means they always co-occur), male characters do tend to speculate more often – and, concurrently, to anticipate others' mental states or reactions more often – than their female counterparts.

	◇ cognition 1 F ① 154	◇ cognition 1 M ① 299	◇ cognition 2 F ① 107	◇ cognition 2 M ① 159
◇ anticipation ① 153	39 (0,15)	62 (0,16)	7 (0,03)	20 (0,07)
◇ rememberi... ① 35	10 (0,06)	19 (0,06) ●		1 (0,01)
◇ speculation ① 35	5 (0,03)	22 (0,07) ●		4 (0,02)

Table 2. A Code co-occurrence table of the most frequent types of cognitive instances.

Table 2 shows ANTICIPATION, REMEMBERING, and SPECULATION co-occurrence between male (M) and female (F) lower- (1) and higher-level (2) cognitive instances. Grey numbers show the code's *groundedness* (the overall code frequency). The quantitative frequency of co-occurrence of the two codes are shown in bold. Numbers in brackets show the c-coefficient. The yellow dot marks cases where the relationship might be significant but the c-coefficient is very small, due to the fact that it is distorted by very big differences in code frequencies.

In metaphorical descriptions of embodied cognitive states (METAPHOR), narratives draw for the most part on conventionalised metaphors. In the portrayal of male characters, thoughts about past and future are expressly located in the character's head ('a memory lingered in his head'; 'the most romantic plans raced through his head'), and rational behaviour is described in terms of body temperature ('he kept his mind cold'). In the portrayal of female characters, metaphors and embodied cognition usually signal some degree of uncertainty: the character 'did not believe her ears' or 'did not trust [somebody] half an inch'. On the one hand, the low

groundedness of these codes prevents us from generalising differences in the portrayal of male and female characters. On the other hand, these results might help to trace text features for analysis in future research.

While there were no significant differences in terms of the types of emotions retrieved, there were subtle differences in frequency – and one difference in frequency that was not so subtle. Even though male characters experienced primary emotions (EMO M1) only 1.33x more often than their female counterparts, they experienced fear (FEAR) 2.5x more often. Moreover, while female characters' fear was conveyed with such expressive terms as 'dread' and 'terror' (hrůza, děs), the tendency for male characters was to convey this feeling more neutrally as 'fear' (strach; cf. Červená et al., 2006).

However, in the portrayal of male characters, fear was also the emotion most often described by means of metaphorical expressions (METAPHOR), namely the urge to move ('he took to his heels'), or – more frequently – the inability to move ('he looked frozen/stock-still'), and sensations of cold ('the blood in his veins ran cold'; 'shivers down his spine', 'heart shivering with fear'). Also frequent are metaphors referring to human internal organs ('heart in his throat'). With female characters, by contrast, metaphorical descriptions of fear tend to relate to the colour of skin ('she turned pale as chalk'), and not the inside of the body. It can be argued that the experience of fear as it is portrayed in the case of male characters is either milder than with their female counterparts, or else it is implied through various bodily states.

To further investigate the various forms by which emotions are expressed through the body, we chose a relatively frequent code: CRY. In our text sample, the code appears 6 times in female characters and 7 times in male characters, suggesting there is only a slight difference in the relative frequency of the code between male and female characters (appearing with slightly higher frequency for female characters). Examining the relevant quotations, an interesting difference emerges: while crying among male characters is predominantly described by the words brečet and brekot, which are colloquial and expressive, the crying of female characters is described – with one exception – by the more neutral plakat (cf. Červená et al., 2006; Machálek, 2019). This suggests that crying for male characters is more symptomatic than for their female counterparts. Other comparisons of the portrayal of emotions among male and female characters, especially as this involves parts of the body, reveal more similarities than differences.

To sum up our findings: in spite of annotating those texts which portray complex male and female characters, we find striking disproportions in our sample between the number of female cognitive and emotional instances with comparison to that of their male counterparts.

Furthermore, we observe a tendency to emphasise the emotional and cognitive instances of only one gender, the texts thus creating distinctively male-centred and female-centred story worlds. By contrast, looking at the quality of cognitive and emotional instances, differences in the portrayal of male and female characters is relatively unpronounced. However, the diverse nature of our text sample and low representation of female inner-state instances leads us to conclude that without a larger data set all comparison between female- and male-related codes remains tentative.

4. Case Studies

To provide nuanced examples of predominantly male- and female-centred narratives while continuing to tap the potential of software-assisted analysis, we will now move on to two case studies. Each of the following excerpts was written by a prolific female author: Astrid Lindgren and Ivona Březinová, respectively. Both authors appeared among the top four positions in our full corpus ($N = 530$) in terms of frequency (Authors, 2022). Astrid Lindgren is a globally famous writer (and her *Pippi Longstocking* series a venerated classic); Ivona Březinová is a contemporary Czech author, whose books have been translated into English, Spanish, and Polish. Both authors show considerable disproportion between male and female characters with regard to the portrayal of their inner states. However, while Lindgren's *Pippi Longstocking* favours the portrayal of female inner states, Březinová's *A Boy and His Dog* includes predominantly male cognitive and emotional instances.

The excerpt from *A Boy and His Dog* tells the story of nine-year-old boy Julin who suffers from a progressive disease that compels him to use a wheelchair. As argued in Authors, 2022, while the excerpt portrays complex cognitive and emotional states on the part of both male and female characters, female cognitive and emotional states are not nearly as rich as that of their male counterparts.

The annotation shows that male characters experience three times as many inner-state instances as female characters do (see Table 1 above), with the disproportion especially pronounced in the portrayal of cognitive states. While male characters are depicted primarily through cognitive processes, even in those passages which deal with emotionally challenging situations (18 cognitive instances compared to 8 emotional instances), female characters

experience more emotions (5 instances) than cognitive states (4 instances). This disproportion cannot be straightforwardly explained with reference to the different numbers of male and female characters: in the excerpt, two boys (Julin, Mirek) and two girls (Dana, Ilča) appear, with a brief appearance of Julin's father and mother. Let us illustrate the gender-polarisation of the text with the following passages. (Examples from *A Boy and His Dog* have been translated from the original Czech into English by the authors of this study.)

“Wow, cool wheels,” Mirek whistled admiringly as Julin entered the locker room. “I wouldn’t mind having one of those too.”

“You’re such an idiot,” Dana shouted at him. “Julin has a wheelchair because he doesn’t have legs.”

“I do have legs,” Julin said.

“Yeah, he does,” Mirek stood beside Julin, staring at Dana contemptuously.

“In fact, you don’t have a head. Or if you do, it’s totally empty”

[...]

“Mirek, would you mind helping me with the zipper?” Julin asked in a soft voice. He didn’t want Dana to think he didn’t have hands or something. She was capable of anything.

2:1... 2:2... 2:4... 2:5... 2:6... 2:7 He...

emo M in body
emo M1
paraverbal

cog M1

emo F in body
emo F1
paraverbal

cog F1

emo M in body
emo M2

cog M2
emo M implied
emo M2

cog M2

Figure 2. A passage from the excerpt *A Boy and His Dog* in Document manager.

In Fig. 2, a passage taken from the middle of the excerpt, Dana, the first female character appears and initiates the first conflict in the story. Her appearance is easily traceable through the colour of the codes in the right panel. Her intentions and motivations are not obvious to the reader, yet it is made clear that she stands in opposition to Mirek, Julin’s friend. Dana’s distance from both male characters is demonstrated paraverbally, namely through her shouting, while Mirek supports Julin not just by admiring his whistling but also by drawing closer to him.

Characterised by just one lower-order cognitive instance and one primary emotion, Dana remains a flat character, while Mirek and Julin are more extensively developed by comparison. Reading each other’s minds, Julin and Mirek forge a bond of friendship, while Dana becomes an outsider in the situation – indeed, an object of Julin’s thoughts who ceases herself to experience any further inner states.

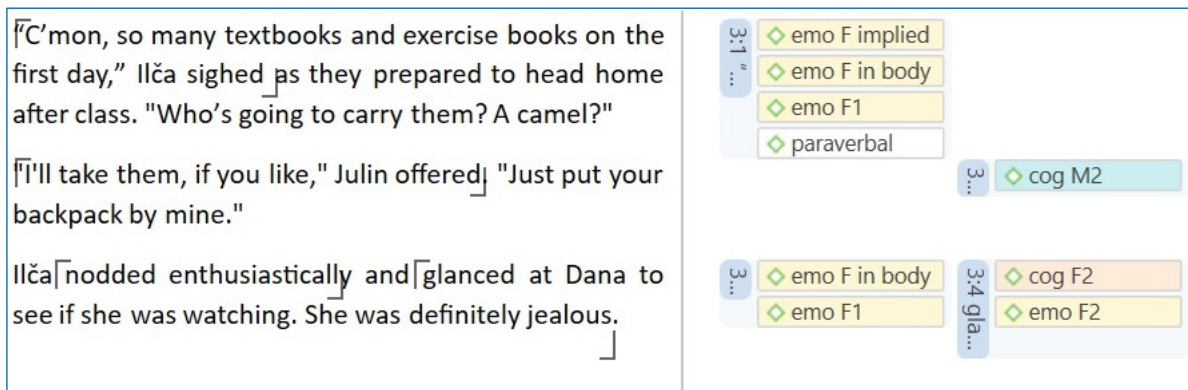


Figure 3. A passage from the excerpt *A Boy and His Dog* in *Document manager*.

In Fig. 3, a second female character, Ilča, enters the scene. Unlike Dana, she is portrayed with a higher-order cognitive instance and a secondary emotion. Notably, these thoughts and feelings are directed towards Dana. Even though we are given to understand, that she is a friend of Julin, in the passage where we get direct access to her motivations, she relates herself to Dana, while male characters are portrayed as developing implicit commonalities in a kind of 'boys' club'. Moreover, while male relationships are depicted as cooperative, the female relationship tends to be competitive.

To sum up, gender imbalance is manifested not just in the male-to-female ratio of inner states, but also in the quality and variety of these inner states and character relations these inner states express.

However, we found a rather unique case in the excerpt of a female-centred text – *Pippi Longstocking* – where the disproportion between male and female inner-state instances did not, in fact, entail a stereotyping of the male character. In this excerpt, female characters are ascribed approximately 2x more inner states than their male counterparts (cf. Table 1 above). Nonetheless, as we would like to show in the two figures below, male and female characters are portrayed in the same depth, in spite of this disproportion in the number of emotional/cognitive instances.

For the purposes of this article, the figures below refer to an English translation of *Pippi Longstocking* by Tiina Nunally (Lindgren, 2007).

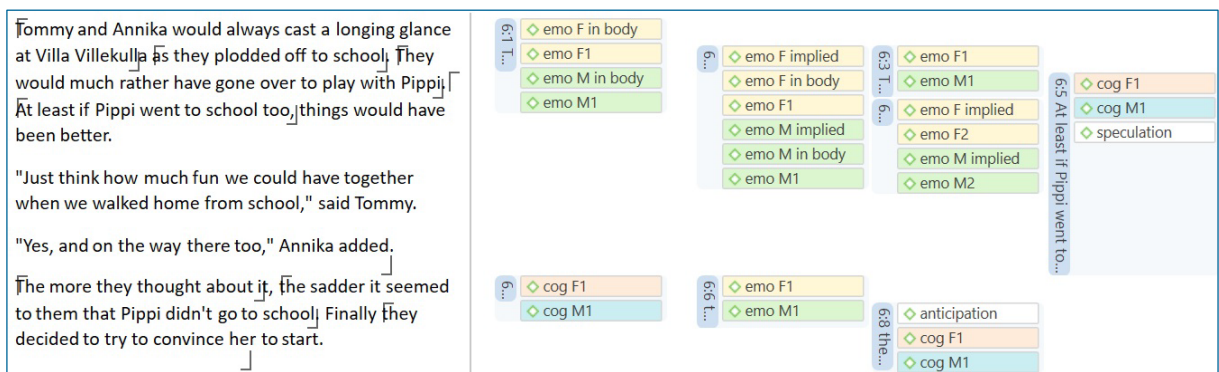


Figure 4. A passage from the excerpt *Pippi Longstocking* in *Document manager*.

While walking to school, Tommy and Annika experience a wide variety of emotions and cognitive states, conveying that they would both rather spend time playing with Pippi. The feeling leads them to imagine how much better it would be if Pippi joined them in school. Sharing the fantasy with each other and becoming more absorbed in it, their sadness grows. Finally they come to the conclusion that they have to persuade Pippi to join them, gradually turning their attention from themselves to Pippi.

Later, Tommy and Annika try to lure Pippi into coming to school by emphasising its appealing aspects. However, seeing that Pippi does not respond to these efforts, they change their tactics to what they imagine to be a more effective approach.

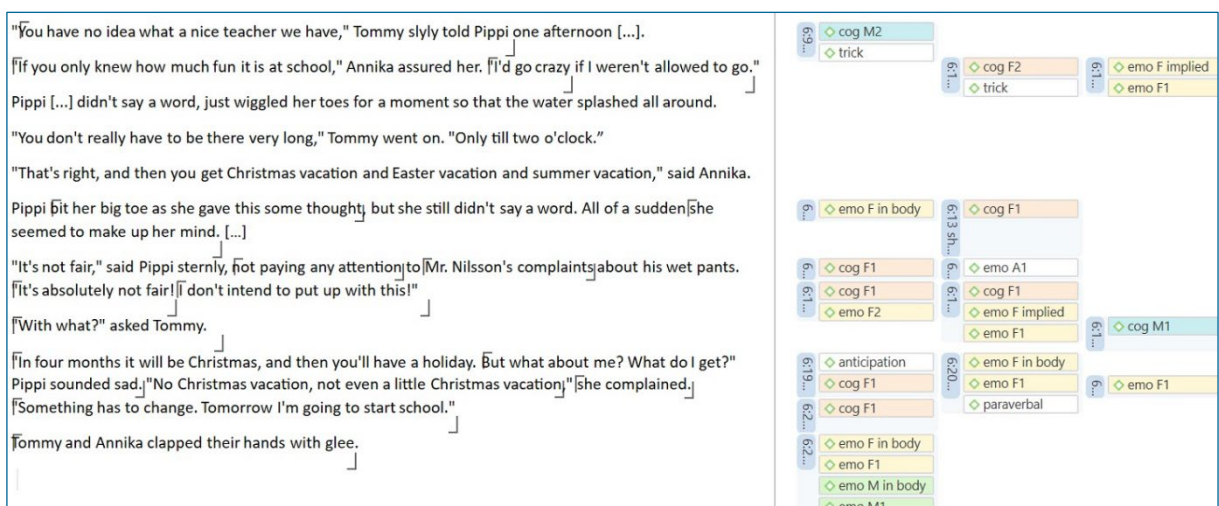


Figure 5. A passage from the excerpt *Pippi Longstocking* in *Document manager*.

In their efforts to convince Pippi to join them in school, Tommy and Annika come to adapt their assumptions about what makes a strong argument, particularly for Pippi. Trying to read Pippi's mind, they stop praising school and point out instead that one does not have to stay very long

each day, and that there are various vacations. Pippi accepts this absurd reasoning, expressing outrage that, not going to school, she does not get any vacations. Afterward, just like Tommy and Annika before her, she goes from frustration to decisive action. While Tommy and Annika achieve their goal, readers will understand the underlying irony.

Looking at these two passages, we can identify several factors which make this excerpt relatively gender-balanced, albeit disproportionate in terms of the number of annotated emotional/cognitive instances. One important factor may be the distribution of the protagonists' roles. Pippi's utterances (and later in the story the teacher's) are a main factor in the numerical dominance of female emotional and cognitive instances in the anthology excerpt as a whole. However, Tommy is certainly not depicted as a flat character. His representation as someone who transforms his thoughts, wishes, and various feelings into a plan for changing Pippi's attitude toward school, clearly conveys an ability to recognise his own emotional needs while simultaneously think about the needs of others. Finally, the excerpt shows his agency: his determination to act on his thoughts and feelings.

Even more importantly, in this excerpt, Tommy and Annika share a common goal, joining forces to achieve the desired result, which seems to make their similarities more relevant than their differences. This sharing of inner states is clearly manifested in the *Document manager* mode in Atlas.ti, with the same types of codes appearing side by side in male and female characters. Moreover, the portrayal of inner states as experienced by Tommy and Annika also develop along the same path; their primary emotions evolve into secondary emotions, and their speculations turn into higher-level attempts to manipulate Pippi by adapting to her responses. In Figs. 4 and 5, this is manifested in the sequence of codes that appear in the right panel of the *Document manager*.

5. Conclusion

Over the past decades, researchers from various fields have argued that the underrepresentation of certain types of characters in literary and curricular texts can negatively impact children's socialisation and self-image. Therefore, they call for maximum character diversity in children's reading (Adam and Harper, 2021; Bishop, 1990; Kucirkova, 2019). However, we argue that the sheer number of male and female characters is not a sufficient criterion in selecting texts for use in educational settings; it is critical that all categories are represented by full-fledged, round characters.

In this article, we examined the ways female and male characters' emotional and cognitive states are portrayed in children's reading anthologies, while developing an innovative text-

analytical, software-assisted approach. We annotated the data of 44 narrative excerpts, focusing on different types of emotional/cognitive instances primarily in terms of their complexity, explicitness/implicitness, and embodiment. Our analysis demonstrated the underrepresentation of female inner states in the selected reading anthologies, and this in spite of a purposeful sample of excerpts in which both male and female characters are portrayed as complex. The low number of cognitive instances in female characters is especially striking.

When Forni (2020, p. 65) takes up the issue of female character representation in literary texts, she argues that from a quantitative viewpoint, 'relevant' (active, developed) female characters tend to be underrepresented in children's books, but also that 'from a qualitative point of view, boys and girls are described as opposite extremes with fixed, standard identities that cannot be confused or mixed. For instance, male and female characters are characterised by different adjectives and personalities, different career opportunities, *different spaces* where they act' (italics ours). As we have shown here, our data confirms the lack of 'relevant' female characters, assuming that a character must be portrayed as experiencing a variety of emotional and cognitive states to be relevant to (young) readers, who might use these inner states as a foundation on which to build their empathy skills.

However, our data also demonstrates relatively little difference between male and female characters in the types of emotional and cognitive states they experience, or the ways they embody them. The notion of 'different spaces' in the context of our study refers rather to the various mutually isolated texts that male and female characters occupy: that is, the respective numbers of male and female inner-state instances in texts revealed that most excerpts were either strongly female- or male-centred. Teachers and other practitioners working with children should consider not just whether they select texts with full-fledged male *and* female characters in similar proportions. Ideally, they should pay attention to whether the texts show male and female characters as sharing the same (text) world.

Across all our text subsamples (male-centred, female-centred and balanced), we found that the ratio of male characters' emotional to cognitive instances remains approximately the same, and that the inner life of male characters tends to be portrayed more frequently by cognitive than emotional instances. The portrayal of female characters, by comparison, tends to vary across the subsamples. However, with the exception of female-centred texts, female characters are depicted more frequently through emotional than cognitive instances, which suggests that the female characters in our sample may be perceived as more 'emotional' and less 'rational' than their male counterparts and may reinforce the stereotype of women as more emotional than

men (Nesbitt and Penn, 2000). Notably, genre seems to play an important role in this, which may serve as a useful cue when pre-selecting texts for educational use.

At the same time, as we demonstrated in our case studies, quantitative analysis of inner-state instances should be supplemented by careful observation and interpretation in the context of individual texts. In our case studies, *A Boy and His Dog* served as an example of a gender-polarised text in which the disproportion in the number of inner states experienced by male and female characters is a reliable sign of the gender imbalances of the text in general. The female-centred excerpt from *Pippi Longstocking*, on the other hand, appears to be exceptional in relation to our sample. In *Pippi*, the underrepresentation of male inner-state instances does not imply emotional and cognitive underdevelopment of the male character.

By making use of Atlas.ti in our analysis of reading anthologies, we were able to examine a middle-size corpus in a way that is similar to literary analysis, but to do so more efficiently, and without first learning specialized IT skills. As for the limitations of our approach, as we found out during data processing in Atlas.ti, we would need to start with a larger sample of texts to deal in more detail with the differences in the quality of male and female inner state types. Especially as regards the underrepresented female characters, the number of individual emotional and cognitive types is too low to draw conclusions. However, as shown above, using Atlas.ti for the analysis of a middle-size corpus has given us valuable suggestions on which phenomena (such as the depiction of male and female characters experiencing fear) are potentially worth exploring with a larger text corpus.

Moreover, applied on texts which vastly differ in length, genre, or author style, our procedure

In conclusion, teachers who strive to include texts with diverse characters in their literary classes should also pay attention to whether and how these characters are portrayed as experiencing various inner states.

proved useful for analyses of diverse sets of texts – during the coding process, researchers can proceed bottom-up, setting up new codes or merging and re-grouping the established ones. The procedure helps to find meaningful similarities as well as idiosyncrasies of individual texts and thus can be fruitful even for analyses outside the educational contexts.

In conclusion, teachers who strive to include texts with diverse characters in their literary classes should also pay attention to whether and how these characters are portrayed as experiencing various inner states. In this regard, it is also worth considering whether the texts portray well-rounded characters of different types, or whether instead they paint pictures of rather separate male-centred and female-centred worlds.

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Low-stakes reflections on learning as a tool for teaching theory through children's books

Reflexiones de bajo riesgo sobre el aprendizaje como herramienta para la enseñanza de la teoría a través de libros para niños

Reflexions sobre l'aprenentatge com a eina d'ensenyament de la teoria a través dels llibres infantils

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Abstract

This study investigates the role of low-stakes reflections on learning in teaching literary theory through children's books. Through an inductive thematic analysis of empirical data collected in a college course in literary analysis, five themes were identified in such reflections: 1. appreciating the use of children's books; 2. recognizing the differences between adult and child perspectives; 3. successes and 4. difficulties with learning literary theory; and 5. the need for more examples of applying theoretical lenses to texts. Low-stakes reflections on learning were shown to be effective in teaching literary theory, with students expressing their appreciation for using children's books and feeling comfortable applying theoretical lenses to them. The study concludes that teaching literary theory through children's books makes difficult theoretical concepts more accessible and enjoyable for students. Low-stakes reflections on learning encourage students to self-evaluate their personal efforts; thus, they can help teachers gauge the students' level of comprehension and the efficacy of scaffolding high-stakes assignments, also providing opportunities to better intervene in student learning. The study suggests that this approach is not limited to English majors, can be combined with visual analysis, and is urgent given the current censorship of children's books in the U.S.

Key words: children's books, literary theory, low-stakes writing, reflective writing.

Resumen

Este estudio investiga el papel de las reflexiones de bajo riesgo sobre el aprendizaje en la enseñanza de la teoría literaria a través de libros para niños. A través de un análisis temático inductivo de datos empíricos recopilados en un curso universitario de análisis literario, se identificaron cinco temas en tales reflexiones: 1. Apreciar el uso de libros para niños; 2. Reconocer las diferencias entre las perspectivas de los adultos y los niños; 3. Éxitos y 4. Dificultades en el aprendizaje de la teoría literaria; y 5. La necesidad de más ejemplos de aplicación de perspectivas teóricas a los textos. Las reflexiones de bajo riesgo sobre el aprendizaje demostraron ser efectivas en la enseñanza de la teoría

literaria, y los estudiantes expresaron su aprecio por el uso de libros para niños y niñas y se sintieron cómodos al aplicar a estas un enfoque teórico. El estudio concluye que la enseñanza de la teoría literaria a través de libros infantiles hace que los conceptos teóricos difíciles sean más accesibles y agradables para los estudiantes. Las reflexiones de bajo riesgo sobre el aprendizaje alientan a los estudiantes a autoevaluar sus esfuerzos personales; por lo tanto, pueden ayudar a los y las docentes a medir el nivel de comprensión de los estudiantes y la eficacia de andamiaje de tareas de alto riesgo, y también brindan oportunidades para intervenir mejor en el aprendizaje del alumnado. El estudio sugiere que este enfoque no se limita a los estudiantes de inglés, se puede combinar con el análisis visual y es urgente dada la censura actual de libros para niños en los EE. UU.

Palabras clave: libros infantiles, teoría literaria, escritura de bajo riesgo, escritura reflexiva.

Resum

Aquest estudi investiga el paper de les reflexions de baix risc sobre l'aprenentatge en l'ensenyament de la teoria literària a través de llibres infantils. Mitjançant una anàlisi temàtica inductiva de les dades empíriques recollides en un curs universitari d'anàlisi literària, en aquestes reflexions es van identificar cinc temes: 1. Valorar l'ús dels llibres infantils; 2. Reconèixer les diferències entre les perspectives d'adult i infantil; 3. Èxits i 4. Dificultats en l'aprenentatge de la teoria literària; i 5. La necessitat de més exemples d'aplicació de perspectives teòriques als textos. Es va demostrar que les reflexions de baix risc sobre l'aprenentatge eren efectives en l'ensenyament de la teoria literària, els estudiants van expressar el seu agraïment per l'ús de llibres infantils i se sentien còmodes aplicant-hi enfocaments teòrics. L'estudi conclou que l'ensenyament de la teoria literària a través de llibres infantils fa que els conceptes teòrics difícils siguin més accessibles i agradables per als estudiants. Les reflexions de baix risc sobre l'aprenentatge animen l'alumnat a autoavaluar els seus esforços personals; per tant, poden ajudar els professors a mesurar el nivell de comprensió dels i de les estudiants i l'eficàcia de les tasques de gran interès, i també ofereixen oportunitats per intervenir millor en l'aprenentatge dels estudiants. L'estudi suggereix que aquest enfocament no es limita a l'alumnat d'anglès, es pot combinar amb l'anàlisi visual i és urgent donada la censura actual dels llibres infantils als EUA.

Paraules clau: llibres infantils, teoria literària, escriptura de baix nivell, escriptura reflexiva.

1. Introduction

As well as at the secondary-school level (Georgandis, 2003, pp. 1, 16-7), courses in children's literature are regularly taught in higher-education programs in the United States geared toward preschool and elementary education majors (Consalvo, 2017, p. 1). In these courses, children's books figure as a tool for teaching "social justice and critical literacy" (Ferguson, 2016, p. 1); "support[ing] children's multiple perspectives and empathy" (Salmon, 2019); and ensuring that preservice teachers "[a]ffirm diversity and exercise critical literacy" (NCTE, 2018). Whereas three decades ago, children's books may have been in "the domain of the educationists' more than 'a subject for literary studies'" (Schmidt, 1992, pp. 243-4), the vast number of critical readings of children's literature suggests that literary theory and children's books are no longer individually marginalized, nor is their combination met with as much skepticism by either academics or lay

readers (cf. Hunt, 1991, pp. 5-6). Library guides to children's literature comprise various critical resources, ranging from feminism and race studies to visual analysis (State Library Victoria, 2022). For example, Paul (1999) demonstrates how feminist theories in particular have worked to expand the archive of children's literature to reflect changing attitudes toward gender and sexuality (p. 114).

Because they are straightforward, familiar, and compact, children's books are perfect for introductory university courses in literary analysis as they can balance out complex and largely unfamiliar literary theory. Children's books can be especially attractive to college students, moreover, who are "hovering between maturity and adolescence" (Knoepfmacher, 1992, p. 1). The objective of this study was to investigate whether low-stakes, informal student writing could be useful in teaching literary theory through children's books. Based on the data collected from 12 students enrolled in a college literary analysis course, the study concludes that low-stakes reflections on learning are a useful teaching tool. By regularly reflecting on and self-evaluating their personal efforts, students can become more thoughtful about their learning process, and also feel more comfortable with and confident about learning and applying theoretical lenses to texts.

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Further, such low-stakes reflections can help teachers gauge the students' level of comprehension as well as the efficacy of scaffolding high-stakes assignments, like the literary analysis essay worth a significant portion of the overall course grade. By giving teachers "snapshots" of student progress, they also provide opportunities to better intervene in and assist student learning. Because students are not experts, however, such reflections may be considered subjective, so they should not be the sole measure of student success.

The study draws on empirical data from a course in literary analysis taught at a U.S. university in Fall 2021. Upon analyzing the low-stakes reflections on learning using an inductive thematic analysis method, a coding/tagging method developed by identifying "connections between ideas and words in the text" to describe emerging patterns (Clary-Lemon, Mueller, & Pantelides, 2022, 85), five themes were identified: 1. the students' appreciation for using children's books to study theory; 2. the differences between child and adult readings; 3. successes and 4. difficulties with learning literary theory; and 5. the need for more examples of applying theory

to texts. The study expected to confirm student resistance to critical readings, especially of cherished books from childhood, the kind of “sentimental distrust” Sadler (1992) underscores in student re-encounters of such texts (p. 145). Also expected was an awareness of the differences between child and “adult” readings (Knoepflmacher, 1992, p. 1), which requires that adults apply what Hunt (1991) has called a “childist” perspective to reading children’s literature (p. 191). Perhaps due to the selection of books, no serious resistance was noted. Rather, the thematic analysis revealed that the majority of students benefitted from using children’s books, though some did question the appropriateness of applying “adult” theory to texts meant for children.

The analyzed low-stakes reflections on learning were not themselves part of the scaffolding of the high-stakes literary analysis essay, but they provided valuable information about the efficacy of such scaffolding. Scaffolding high-stakes projects with low-stakes activities has been proven effective in teaching academic writing, as the purpose of low stakes “is not so much to produce excellent pieces of writing as to get students to think, learn, and understand more of the course material” (Elbow, 1997, p. 5). Other course activities, including lectures, class discussions, and quizzes, provided students with “component skills” to assist them with learning the “higher skills” of identifying and applying theoretical lenses, thus adapting to the college classroom the notion of “scaffolding” originally conceived of by Wood, Bruner, and Ross (1976, p. 89) and developed by others (Maybin, Mercer, & Stierer, 1992). The low-stakes reflections on learning provided “snapshots” of the students’ self-assessment of their personal efforts and comprehension of course material, and thus they could be used by the teacher to assess the students’ progress and, if necessary, to intervene to better meet student needs, such as for more discussion and models of applying lenses to texts.

Adding an element of reflection, moreover, can assist students in becoming more deliberate about their learning process. Engaging student writers in self-reflecting on their own work can help them better evaluate their personal efforts (Sparks-Langer & Colton, 1991). The benefits of such writing are well-established (Rogers, 2001; Elbow, 1997, p. 12; cf. Bowman & Addyman, 2014). Reflective writing has also been shown to be an effective predictor of academic success (Tsingos-Lucas, Bosnic-Anticevich, Schneider, & Smith, 2017), making it a useful element not only in scaffolding a more sophisticated assignment but also in gauging the students’ comprehension of the material.

2. Method and Course Design

To investigate whether informal student writing could be useful in teaching literary theory through children's books, a thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2019; Braun & Clarke, 2006; Kiger & Varpio, 2020) was performed on the low-stakes reflections on learning, or blog entries, submitted to the online learning platform (Blackboard) for a literary analysis course offered at a U.S. university in Fall 2021. Of the 15 students enrolled in the class, 12 consented to their data being used for the study; one consented, but withdrew from the class mid-semester; one did not consent, and another never returned the signed consent form.

No demographics were collected, as this was not deemed relevant to the study. It is worth noting, however, that the university has a traditional college-aged and largely homogenous white student population, most of whom are native speakers of American English. In terms of their major disciplines, eight of the students who consented to the study were English majors; one majored in Business Administration; one undeclared; and two double-majored in English and Biological Sciences. Three more students majored in English Education. The students also had a number of different minor specializations, including: one minor in Chemistry; one in Business Administration; one in Theatre Arts; and one double-minor in Journalism and Psychology.

2.1. Course Design

The course was organized in the following way: students were first introduced to a theoretical lens by reading and discussing a chapter in Klages' *Literary theory* (2017). In the informational class session, the instructor gave a lecture, with opportunities for student input and questions, accompanied by a PowerPoint presentation later made available on Blackboard. In the subsequent class session, students were asked to apply the concepts they had learned to a children's book: for example, applying a Marxist lens to Dr. Seuss' *The Lorax* (1971) or a queer studies lens to Richardson and Parnell's *And Tango makes three* (2005). This was followed by another session during which students gave 10-minute oral presentations to the class based on critical articles that directly apply the lens under consideration. Theoretical lenses were often combined in the articles, thus supplying students with "mentor" texts "to be studied and imitated" when writing their own intersectional analyses (NWP, 2013).

To prepare the students, most of whom were unfamiliar with literary theory, for a high-stakes literary analysis essay, several scaffolding activities were assigned throughout the semester, including two hour-long quizzes on theoretical lenses; one in-class presentation on an academic article analyzing an assigned children's book; and regular small group discussions with a note-

taking component and occasional individual writing activities, both shared in a Google Doc. The literary analysis essay was further scaffolded, broken down into several components: an informal proposal, including the chosen title and two or more relevant theoretical lenses; a draft, which received extensive comments, but no grade; and the revised final draft, which received both comments and a grade. These were all designed to meet the main course objective: becoming familiar with a variety of literary and cultural theories, theorists, and theoretical lenses and applying these lenses to textual and visual analyses of children's literature.

Although the five low-stakes reflections on learning submitted on Blackboard were not part of this scaffolding process, they provided valuable opportunities for students to reflect and self-assess, and also information to the teacher about their learning. The students were asked to write "a snapshot of your learning process, progress, or challenges" every three weeks. As the instructions were open-ended, these blog entries ranged from reflections on external factors, such as job pressures and mental health, to more focused assessments of personal efforts in the class or reactions to individual assignments or grades. The students were informed that their blog entries would be viewable by their peers as well as the teacher, and though there was no requirement for others to read or respond, such interaction was appreciated. Everyone got full credit simply for completing these reflections on time; they were not graded, but did receive brief comments from the teacher. Occasionally, one or two anonymized reflections were shared in the class PowerPoint to provide "models" and/or inspiration.

2.2. Method

For the purposes of analysis, the low-stakes reflections on learning were anonymized, with letters A-L assigned to students instead of names. Through an inductive thematic analysis, two initial codes and five common themes were identified. Student responses coded as "children's books" were found to engage with two themes: 1. appreciating the use of children's books, perceived as familiar and/or simple; and 2. recognizing the differences in understanding between an adult and a child perspective (imagined or recollected). Student responses coded as "literary theory" engaged with three themes, two of which were the opposite sides of the same issue: 3. successes with learning and applying literary theory; 4. difficulties with learning and applying literary theory; and 5. the need for more examples of applying theoretical lenses to texts. Coding something as "children's literature" was not meant to bypass the challenges of defining "children's literature" (Gannon, 1992, p. 59), nor the critical questions this genre entails, such as "the child-adult response," the social function of children's literature, multiculturalism (and ethnocentrism), and censorship (Sadler, 1992, p. 145). These and other issues were addressed throughout the course, but not explicit in the collected data.

3. Results

Using representative quotations from the anonymized student data, the following offers a report of how the researcher interprets the role of low-stakes reflections on learning in teaching literary theory through children's books. A synchronic thematic analysis reveals that, on average, students engage with one of the themes in any given reflection; those entries which engage with two or more themes are of special interest and are, in turn, analyzed diachronically below.

3.1. Synchronic analysis of reflections on learning

3.1.1 Appreciating the use of children's books

Of the 12 students, nine mentioned their appreciation for children's books. More precisely, the students wrote about how they "appreciate looking back on children's literature, especially stories which I was read during my childhood" and "appreciated as a kid" (B), also noting that, contrary to their expectation, "we would [not] have to move up in our reading level and try to analyze books that probably I would not even understand," but rather "go back to the basics and read these children's stories and find theories within them" (E), adding that it was "really cool to [...] begin to make connections to something that seems so simple and easy" (F). One student felt "a lot more comfortable and prepared for the class" as they¹ "had a previous background with children's literature exposing me to racism, feminism, depression, etc." (J); echoing this, another student commented on their increased level of comfort due to "prior knowledge" of both children's literature and theory (L).

In some instances, the students' entries combined the appreciation for children's books with other themes, such as the difficulty of comprehending academic discourse (4.): "I do really enjoy the children's literature portion of the course, and I like analyzing those generally, but it is the academic style of language that I can't seem to connect with" (I).

3.1.2 Recognizing the differences between an "adult" and a child perspective

Five students commented on the differences between "adult" and child perspectives, noting that theoretically-informed interpretations offer "an interesting take" on a familiar text (G); are "much deeper than I originally thought" (A); suggest that children's texts are "so deep in [ideological] controversy" (C); and also "that children's books could be analyzed in ways that a child wouldn't quite understand yet" (L). Perceiving children's books (but not children) as simple, one student expressed their curiosity "as to how literary analysis (analyses) could possibly be

¹ The pronoun "they" (in the singular) is used to refer to the student so as not to reveal their gender and potentially compromise their anonymity, and also to minimize any gendered assumptions.

applied to a format designed to use simplified storytelling as a tool in childrens' education"; describing theoretical interpretations as "pretty deep subtext," the student wondered, "can a child's brain development grasp such things?" (D). Yet, this student also conceded that "adults often underestimate the capacity for understanding within a child," and that certain "short" texts may offer "a lot to unpack" (D). Similarly, in their discussion notes on psychoanalyzing Sendak's *Where the wild things are* (1963), the students alleged that a "deeper" interpretation "takes away a child's imagination."

3.1.3 Successes with learning and applying literary theory

Six of the 12 students self-evaluated their personal efforts as being successful. They described theory as "making a lot more sense" and themselves as "feel[ing] more confident in my abilities to speak on each of the lenses that we have covered" (G). Echoing the feeling of "comfort," another student added, "I have a better grasp and understanding of these theories and lenses than I have ever before" (B). Along similar lines, one student admitted to expanding their horizons: "I am doing better at keeping an open mind and really focusing on the content" and gaining "a great handle on all of these lenses" (I). Moreover, students expressed their confidence about applying theory beyond children's books to "adult literature as well" (C) and "anything you come across in life [to] obtain a deeper level of understanding" (H).

3.1.4 Difficulties with learning and applying literary theory

Nine of the 12 enrolled students also mentioned their difficulties with learning and applying theory, finding theoretical lenses "[a]s of right now, [...] to be a bit confusing" (G); "get[ting] confused when we have multiple people describing the same theory differently" (K); "get[ting] lost" when identifying specific theories that had been applied to a text (E); "struggling to really connect with the content of the course, despite reading and re-reading the texts" (I); and "feel[ing] confused about applying the concepts" and (following a quiz) "doubting if I completely grasped what we've been learning" (A). One student had trouble "grasp[ing] a concept without a concrete definition of a term before talking extensively on this topic," and so they "decided to take my peer's advice (from the last informal blog) and conduct contextual research on my own before completing the upcoming assignment. This helped tremendously with my confidence" (H). This is evidence of student collaborative learning and confidence building from reading their peers' reflections.

3.1.5 The need for more examples of applying theoretical lenses to texts

Four students thought that the teacher should offer more examples of theoretical applications. One wished that different texts had been assigned (D); another requested "more time" for

discussion, application, and questions (A); and two—more examples of “how to apply” the various lenses (J, G). The students’ anxiety about misapplying theoretical lenses to texts was corroborated by an informal midterm assessment survey, wherein they mentioned “applying” or “using” theories or lenses eight times in response to three different questions: what has caused the most difficulty, what questions they had about the next assignment, and what they were still hoping to learn. Only one student explicitly questioned the relevance of theoretical approaches—“why we use them” (G); hence, this initially identified theme (6. relevance) was removed for lack of incidence and frequency.

3.2 Diachronic analysis of reflections on learning

A diachronic analysis of reflections on learning suggests a traceable trajectory in student learning. Two examples were considered in which four or five of the coded themes were identified; entries from the beginning of the semester were compared to subsequent ones, noting any growth in learning and confidence building.

3.2.1 Student G

Student G’s five entries evidenced such a trajectory and were exemplary in their comprehensiveness, as all five coded themes appear at least once. In the first reflection, Student G engaged with four of the five themes: unfamiliar with theorizing literature “much deeper than” for enjoyment or information-gathering, the student found theoretical lenses “a bit confusing” (4.), adding that “it will help to be shown more examples in class about how we use these theories, and also why we use them” (5.). The student also acknowledged the accessibility of children’s literature (1.): “I am glad that we are learning these theories through children’s literature, at least I have familiarity with those.” By the third blog, the student felt more confident: “The theories are making a lot more sense and the ways that we use them as lenses for literature have become clearer as well” (G). By the fourth, they were also learning to appreciate the differences between an adult/child or expert/lay perspective (2.), noting that the critical article “had such an interesting take on the story that was so different from how I have always seen [Rey & Rey’s] *Curious Goerge* [1941]” (G). In the final blog, the student self-evaluated their progress as meeting the course objectives: “I feel confident in my abilities to speak on each of the lenses that we have covered. [...] I understand the basic principles of each and also how I could apply them to a reading,” thereby recognizing their success in applying theoretical lenses to children’s books (3.).

3.2.2 Student L

A second diachronic analysis of Student L's reflections on learning revealed a similar trajectory. In the first reflection, Student L admitted the difficulty of understanding literary theory and deconstruction in particular (4.), but also conceded that applying a deconstructionist lens to a familiar children's text made it less intimidating (1. and 3.): "However, trying to do a deconstruction of a book like *The Cat in the Hat* is easier to accomplish because the writing style is more digestible, even though the potential for analysis is similar." In the second entry, the student expressed more confidence about participating in discussion due to prior knowledge of the children's text and the theoretical lens: "I was able to participate more in the analysis of [Silverstein's] *The Giving Tree* [1964] because I had a prior knowledge of both the children's book AND feminist theory." By their fourth entry, Student L's comments seemed enthusiastic, describing unfamiliar children's books as "more interesting to me, as they were ones I hadn't heard of or read myself before, which made them more exciting," thus confirming their appreciation for children's books (1.). The final blog exemplified both (3.) successes with theory and (2.) differences in perspective: "this class has taught me so much more about English analysis and ways it can be applied than I ever thought; I didn't realize that children's books could be analyzed in ways that a child wouldn't quite understand yet" (L).

4. Discussion

In this section, the results are contextualized by relating them to larger issues at the intersection of children's literature and literary theory, including lay and academic skepticism about applying theory to books for child/younger readers. The researcher's initial assumption that college students would resist applying theory to their cherished books from childhood is discussed, along with some implications for forging student agency and collaborative learning.

4.1. Applying theory to children's literature

In *Teaching children's literature*, Sadler (1992) wrote, "children's literature—as an academic discipline for instruction and serious research—is no longer just for children" (p.146). The first seminar on children's literature at the Modern Language Association was held in 1969 in Denver, Colorado, though courses in the field had been offered much earlier (Sadler, 1992, p. 144). Yet three decades later, "children's literature" still seemed "a contradiction in terms," with some objecting to the extension of the value of "literariness" to "books designed for an audience of limited experience, knowledge, skill and sophistication" (Hunt, 2001, p. 2). It is "a non-subject" for many academics, deemed unfit for scholarly inquiry, whereas to those outside of academia, it is a sacred space for educating and entertaining children to be shielded from pleasure-denying theorists (Hunt, 1991, pp. 5-6). The former informs the opinion that anyone, regardless of

training, can be an “expert” in children’s literature, the latter—that children’s books are “all on the side of the angels,” innocent, “ideologically neutral,” and not to be meddled with (Hunt, 1991, p. 142). However, “far from inhabiting some unworldly, unfallen plane, children’s literature is not only *necessarily* infused with and part of the ideological structure of our world, but it is more prone to manipulation than most” (Hunt, 2001, p. 20).

Theory is equally fraught. It is often perceived by academics and laypersons alike as riddled with pretentious jargon, needlessly complicated, and impractical at best, while at worst—unpatriotic, dangerous, and inappropriate for classrooms. The current onslaught of bills censoring critical race theory and the teaching of gender and sexuality across the U.S. (ACLU, 2022) is an extreme example of the suspicious, and often paradoxical, attitude toward literary theory and children’s literature. Although many people deny that they were shaped by their early reading (“I read xyz when I was a child, and it didn’t do *me* any harm”), they also consider childhood an important life-stage and children, “vulnerable, susceptible, and [to] be protected from manipulation” (Hunt, 1999, p. 2).

This paradoxical attitude toward children’s literature—that it is “important—and yet it is not” (Hunt, 1999, p. 2)—makes it an engaging subject for college students, who are figuring out what is meant by “literature” and “theory,” and what makes their study worthwhile.

Informal reflections on learning are telling in this regard; combining the appreciation for children’s books with the difficulty of comprehending academic/theoretical discourse, these data instantiate what Hunt (1999) identifies as the tensions at the intersection of theory and children’s books.

To quote Student I’s reflection, “I do really enjoy the children’s literature portion of the course [...] but it is the academic style of language that I can’t seem to connect with.”

Pedagogically pertinent is the general agreement among the students about the benefits of applying literary theory to children’s literature, with 75% of the students registering their appreciation with phrases like “appreciated as a kid” (B), “really cool” and “so simple and easy” (F). That familiarity with children’s literature made more than one student “comfortable” (J, B) and even “excited” (A, I, L) suggests that there is value to introducing theory in this way. Admittedly, being non-experts, students might overestimate their

Informal reflections on learning are telling in this regard; combining the appreciation for children’s books with the difficulty of comprehending academic/theoretical discourse, these data instantiate what Hunt (1999) identifies as the tensions at the intersection of theory and children’s books.

own progress; however, at the introductory level, comfort and confidence in applying literary theory could be considered more important than the precision with which such application is made. This builds on Hunt's (1991) "Anyone can be an expert" attitude: "Adults who would feel unqualified to express even an opinion about a peer-text feel free to talk about children's books because they do not have the shadow of the schoolteacher's 'right answer' hanging over their heads" (p. 144). The attitude is corroborated by the student data, and it is not necessarily bad. The perceived accessibility of children's books can be turned into learning opportunities, especially for majors other than in English Language or Literature.

In the notes to their small-group discussions, students similarly commented that applying theoretical lenses to children's books made the literary theory less confusing and the children's books more enjoyable, because theory opened familiar stories up to multiple new interpretations. When applying a deconstructionist lens to Dr. Seuss' *The cat in the hat comes back* (1958), for example, one group wrote: "Once you've read the book a few times, the entire basis of it (or the structure) gets boring. As you add in more possible theories and meanings that you can apply, its more enjoyable because you can almost turn any part of the book into something else." The students also stated: "Used as a lens, readers can see stories in a different light." When discussing Andersen's *The little mermaid* (1837), one group shared: "A feminist reading gives the little mermaid's sisters more value in the story when they give up their hair for her. It also makes it more entertaining because it allows you to look deeper into the story by giving the women goals and their own identities."

Moreover, in their literary analysis essays, students approached children's literature as complex, ideologically rich, and multivalent. Although some reiterated the texts' more obvious didactic purpose, largely, though with varying degrees of sophistication, the students' thesis paragraphs reflected their awareness of how children's books and films shape kids by introducing them to diversity, adversity, and other mature issues. For example, feminism and queer theories helped one student interpret Disney's *Mulan* (1998) as "a much bigger movie than we thought it was" (C); a focus on gender and race added "an additional element to the story" of *Cinderella* (1809) (G); race, postcolonialism, and animal studies offered "different perspectives [to] unearth a deeper understanding" of *Kung Fu Panda* (2008) (F); structuralism, feminism, and race studies similarly offered "a powerful critique of several social problems like discrimination and prejudice in today's society" in the film *Zootopia* (2016) (H); and feminism and Marxism "show[ed] how the inequality of the characters is developed and created throughout [*The lion king*, 1994]" (J). Combining feminism with ecocriticism, one student re-read *The giving tree* as "a layered criticism of chauvinistic, privileged mentalities and borderline-hedonistic consumption of

natural resources" (D); another student applied the same combination to the Disney film *Moana* (2016) to trace "a theme of women's empowerment [...] while also highlighting and advocating for environmental change" (L).

The cognitive dissonance around children's texts—as both influential socializing forces and too simple to contain ideological messaging—is also evident in the data. One student contrasted the "pretty deep subtext" of literary analysis, presumably a sophisticated adult enterprise, with the "simplified storytelling" meant for child/younger readers (D). Another student described the question of influence as "still to be decided" (C), thereby reiterating the opinion that children's books are simultaneously important and unimportant. But this could also be used pedagogically to introduce students to the differences between adults' and children's reading experiences: the child's might be analyzed in terms of the reception of the work and its psychological implications for a specific reader/listener, whereas the adult's would include matters of literary history, genre, trope, and a close reading or *explication du texte* (McGillis, 1996, p. 5).

4.2. Resistance to "adult" perspectives on children's books

Contrary to the literature on the subject, the re-encounter of texts familiar from childhood did not produce much resistance. Knoepfmacher (1992) anticipates that, when re-encountering children's books, the "new" interpretation "amends, complicates, and even disturbs the memory of earlier perceptions," forcing the student "to recognize a conflict in reader positions that need to be accommodated" (p. 1). Sadler (1992) warns prospective teachers of "the student's frequent sentimental distrust of taking any critical approach at all to the subject"; due to their deep affective bonds, "[s]uch students often find themselves trying, emotionally, to hold on to their own childhood dreams as they are being asked intellectually to confront issues they would rather not be told exist in *their favorite* children's book" (p. 145).

It was only in a few cases that the students objected to a theoretical (mis)interpretation. For example, in their discussion of *The little mermaid* through a disability studies lens, they noted that, as children, they felt empathy for the (Disney) mermaid, but "didn't necessarily label her with a disability." The students added that, rather than disability, they "thought of [the mermaid] as a completely different species, so for her losing her tail and learning to walk is going to be difficult [...] Similar to a toddler learning to walk." Objections were also raised to psychoanalytical interpretations as "reading too much into it." Cases like these can be transformed into teachable moments for instructors and students to "participat[e] in a creative tension that reproduces an adult author's own activation of a latent child self in fashioning a text simultaneously addressed to child and grown-up" (Knoepfmacher, 1992, p. 1).

4.3. From self-reflective to collaborative learning

Along with providing opportunities for the instructor to gauge the students' level of comfort and familiarity with theoretical lenses from their self-assessment of their personal efforts, in at least one instance the informal blog provided an opportunity for collaborative learning; it also led to a student taking agency over their own learning process based on something their peer had mentioned in their reflection. Commenting on struggling with literary theory ("It was difficult for me to grasp a concept without a concrete definition of a term before talking extensively on this topic"), this student "decided to take my peer's advice (from the last informal blog) and conduct contextual research on my own before completing the upcoming assignment. This helped tremendously with my confidence" (H). Although the students were not required to read others' entries, this demonstrates that some did and put that reading to good use by learning collaboratively from others and thereby empowering themselves.

5. Conclusions

This study suggests that teaching literary theory through children's books can engage college students in their learning and assist in the comprehension of difficult theoretical concepts, such as literary theories and theoretical lenses. Low-stakes reflections on learning provide opportunities for students to reflect on and self-evaluate their successes and struggles with course content, and for instructors to gauge and adjust for student comprehension.

Furthermore, a teacher could use informal reflections on learning to model and improve reflective writing skills (Ryan, 2011).

Because demographics were not collected for the current study, further research is

Low-stakes reflections on learning provide opportunities for students to reflect on and self-evaluate their successes and struggles with course content, and for instructors to gauge and adjust for student comprehension.

recommended to investigate whether class, gender, race/ethnicity, ability, and other identity factors, along with the students' previous exposure to literature, aid in their comprehension of literary theory. The number and types of children's books students were exposed to in childhood might also influence their appreciation of or resistance to theory upon re-encountering those texts as adults.

One area for development is visual analysis. Especially when analyzing picturebooks for younger readers, one must consider both the words and the illustrations, as well as the often complex interrelationships between them. Nodelman (1999) points out that picturebooks are "inherently ironic" and in

need of “decoding,” effectively “turn[ing] readers into semioticians” (p. 79). With half of the students choosing popular films to analyze in their final course essays, a number that is likely to increase given the decline in literary reading over the past several decades (NEA, 2002) and the appeal of digital media among teenagers (Twenge, Martin, & Spitzberg, 2019), the visual becomes integral. Although visual elements were not mentioned in the reflections on learning, at least one informal writing activity addressed it by asking the students to focus on the illustrations in Love’s *Julián is a mermaid* (2018), a visually rich yet verbally economical book about a gender non-conforming child. Such activities could assist students in exploring the intricacies of children’s visual perception, such as how young children learn about hierarchical valuation: who is at the center, who is named and therefore, who is important, and the intriguing implications of this for children assuming “subject positions” and acquiring cultural assumptions (Nodelman, 1999, p. 73).

To conclude, the researcher invites other teachers to entertain this approach to teaching literary theory and to use low-stakes reflections on learning as a tool for students to reflect on children’s literature. Consider it an imperative even, given the widespread banning of children’s books, like *And Tango makes three* (Peters, 2016), in secondary-education facilities across the United States. This way, even those students who do not encounter diverse children’s books prior to college can be exposed to them, while teachers-in-training can bring the insights of literary theory, if not the books themselves, into their future classrooms.

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Assessing children's critical thinking through the "Critical Thinking Skills Evaluation Tool" (C.T.S.E.T.)

Evaluar el pensamiento crítico de los niños a través de la
"Herramienta de Evaluación de Habilidades de Pensamiento
Crítico" (H.E.H.P.C)

Avaluació del pensament crític dels nens mitjançant "l'eina
d'Avaluació de les Habilitats de Pensament Crític" (E.A.H.P.C)

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Abstract

The present research study was carried out in a doctoral dissertation context aiming to explore how the wordless book's images promote critical thinking skills such as interpretation, analysis, explanation, inference and evaluation. The study sample was consisted of 120 First Grade students, who go to 4 state schools in Larissa (Greece). The *Critical Thinking Skills Evaluation Tool (C.T.S.E.T)* was designed. The research process was based on a quasi-experimental design in order to evaluate the comparison groups' critical thinking skills (experimental and control). Experimental group children's higher achievements make *C.T.S.E.T* an effective tool for assessing children's critical thinking skills in the process of interpreting the book's story only through images and lead to the conclusion that children's critical thinking is improved through the application of educational programs and practices for approaching the wordless books in school learning environments (Housen, 2002; Pantaleo, 2017; Yenawine, 2013).

Keywords: Critical Thinking, Wordless Book, Quasi-experimental design

Resumen

El presente estudio de investigación se llevó a cabo en un contexto de tesis doctoral sobre como las imágenes del libro sin palabras promueven habilidades de pensamiento crítico como interpretación, análisis, explicación, inferencia y evaluación. La muestra del estudio estuvo compuesta por 120 estudiantes de primer grado, que asisten a 4 escuelas públicas en Larissa (Grecia). Se diseñó la *Herramienta de Evaluación de Habilidades de Pensamiento Crítico (H.E.H.P.C)*. El proceso de investigación se basó en un diseño cuasi-experimental con el fin de evaluar las habilidades de pensamiento crítico de los grupos comparados (experimental y control). Los mayores logros de los niños en el grupo experimental hacen de *H.E.H.P.C* una herramienta eficaz para evaluar las

habilidades de pensamiento crítico de los niños en el proceso de interpretación de la historia del libro solo a través de imágenes y llevan a la conclusión de que el pensamiento crítico de los niños se mejora mediante la aplicación de programas educativos y prácticas para el abordaje de los libros sin palabras en ambientes escolares de aprendizaje (Housen, 2002; Pantaleo, 2017; Yenawine, 2013).

Palabras clave: Pensamiento crítico, Libro sin palabras, Diseño cuasi-experimental

Resum

El present estudi de recent estudi de recerca es va dur a terme en un context de tesi doctoral i va abordar com les imatges del llibre sense paraules promouen les habilitats de pensament crític com ara la interpretació, l' anàlisi, l'explicació, la inferència i l'avaluació. La mostra d'estudi estava formada per 120 alumnes de primer grau, que van a 4 escoles públiques de Larissa (Grècia). Es va dissenyar l'eina *Eina d'Avaluació d'Habilitats de Pensament Crític (E.A.H.P.C.)*. El procés de recerca es va basar en un disseny quasi experimental per tal d'avaluar les habilitats de pensament crític dels grups de comparació (experimental i control). Els èxits més elevats dels nens del grup experimental fan que el *M.A.H.P.C.* siga una eina eficaç per avaluar les labilitats de pensament crític dels nens en el procés d'interpretació de la història del llibre només a través d'imatges i porten a la conclusió que el pensament crític dels nens es millora mitjançant l'aplicació de programes educatius. i pràctiques per apropar-se als llibres sense paraules en entorns d'aprenentatge escolar (Housen, 2002; Pantaleo, 2017; Yenawine, 2013).

Paraules clau: Pensament crític, Llibre sense paraules, Disseny quasi experimental

1. Introduction

Wordless books are considered an ideal tool for developing oral and written skills (Smith, 2004). Besides, they promote the cultivation of visual literacy (Arizpe & Styles, 2003). Visual literacy skills provide children an important communication tool. The greatest benefit this tool offer children is being able to develop critical thinking skills through processing visual stimuli in school or out-of-school learning environments (Rowell, McLean & Hamilton, 2012).

According to the literature review there are a lot of studies investigating responses when children read picture books (Giannikopoulou, 2008; Misiou, 2020). However, there is limited data from studies that focus on the development of children's critical thinking skills through "reading" wordless books (Pantaleo, 2017). This gap is attempted to be covered by the present thesis that adds a piece of original research to the international literature.

2. Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework of this work was: a) the ideas of the *American Philosophical Association*, known as the "consensus statement" (A.P.A., 1990; Facione, 1990a) regarding a commonly accepted definition of critical thinking and b) the *California Critical Thinking Skills Test (C.C.T.S.T.)* recommended by the American Philosophical Association (A.P.A., 1990). According to Facione (1990a) *C.C.T.S.T.* is the most appropriate tool for investigating critical thinking skills of individuals (Facione, 1990a).

Among the six (6) critical thinking skill evaluation indicators that proposed by the *American Philosophical Association* (A.P.A., 1990) (interpretation, analysis, explanation, inference, evaluation and self-control) for the construction of the present research tool were used only the five (5) first indicators (I). The last skill named *self-control* that related to the individual's motivation (self-regulated learning) (Facione, 1990a) was excluded as it was considered a challenging skill for First Grade students (Matta, 2017).

In order to adapt the *California Critical Thinking Skills Test (C.C.T.S.T.)* to the needs of the present research, *Bloom's Classification of Thinking Levels* (Bloom & Krathwohl, 1956) was used in combination with *Visual Thinking Strategies Curriculum (V.T.S.)* (Housen, 2001). In this way the present research tool included in the literature and in the context of an educational intervention that could be applied in school learning environments.

Bloom's Taxonomy is one of the most well-known tools for assessing critical thinking skills. It hierarchically describes the six levels of thinking: 1) knowledge 2) understanding 3) implementation 4) analysis 5) synthesis and 6) evaluation. The first three levels are lower level thinking skills and involve recall, understanding and implementation. The last three levels are higher level thinking skills and involve analysis, evaluation and creation (Bloom & Krathwohl, 1956).

V.T.S. (Visual Thinking Strategies) is a group-cooperative teaching method that originated in 1991 at the Museum of Modern Art in New York. The intent of Visual Thinking Strategies curriculum is "to build visual literacy" skills (Yenawine, 2013, p. viii). It exploits the images and develops the viewer's critical thinking skills. Particularly, the classroom teacher can apply this process when interacting orally with students during discussions in order to facilitate a student-centered discovery process that involves student discussing, discovering and reasoning about images. The VTS process consists of three (3) questions: a) What's going on in this image? b) What makes you say that? and c) What else can we find? (Housen, 1999, 2001; Pantaleo, 2017; Yenawine, 1999).

Based on the assumption that images are not just signs but meaningful open texts subject to the personal interpretation (Moriarty, 1996), they are part of a sign system that secretly speaks to us (Uspenskij et al., 2003 [1973]). Peirce's semiotics (1981; [1955]) formed the theoretical framework of this paper to document bibliographically why wordless books have been used as a tool in order to explore and promote the development of First Grade students' critical thinking skills. Based on Peircean semiotics during the meaning-making process of the wordless book, children focus not only on the "virtual symbols" but mainly on the "virtual signs" because they are more "open" to interpretation. The "virtual symbols are more "closed" interpretive conventions. Besides "virtual signs" are not based on arbitrarily defined relations of concepts but on personal experience (Peirce, 1991, p. 239).

3. Purpose - research questions

This paper contributes to the existing literature and provides data regarding the role of the

**This study aims at investigating:
a) the role of the wordless books in the development of students' critical thinking skills and b) the effect of specific approaches that based on the images of wordless books in order to develop First Grade students' critical thinking skills.**

wordless book in the development of First Grade students' critical thinking skills. Specifically, this study aims at investigating: a) the role of the wordless books in the development of students' critical thinking skills and b) the effect of specific approaches that based on the images of wordless books in order to develop First Grade students' critical thinking skills.

The following research questions were formulated to investigate the above objectives:

- a) Is it possible to develop First Grade students' critical thinking skills through specific strategies for using wordless books?
- b) Are there any differences between the type and number of First Grade students' critical thinking skills?

4. Research process

4.1. Research tool

Aiming to investigate the role of wordless books in the development of First Grade students' critical thinking skills the *Critical Thinking Skills Evaluation Tool (C.T.S.E.T.)* was designed. The *C.T.S.E.T.* was used for comparisons between the groups of First grade students who were the sample of the main research. Children's critical thinking skills were measured on the following

scales/ indicators: 1) *interpretation*; 2) *analysis*; 3) *explanation*; 4) *inference* and 5) *evaluation* (Facione, 1990a).

According to the design of *C.T.S.E.T.*, modern teaching practices during an educational intervention were applied. Besides cognitive activities were planned in order to develop First Grade students' critical thinking skills. The planning of the activities was done according to the material proposed by the Teacher Training Organization (T.T.O) which is applied in primary education (Koulaidis, 2007).

4.2. Study sample

The study sample was consisted of 120 First Grade students who go to four (4) state elementary schools in Larissa, the largest city of Thessaly region of Greece. Based on the research design, half of these students were allocated to the control group and the rest of them to the experimental group using the randomization method. Among the 120 students who finally participated in the survey, 118 were Greek students and 2 were Albanian. All participants came from all socio-economic strata.

4.3. Selection and presentation of research material

Journey (2018), *Quest (2019)*, *Return (2019)* were the wordless books which have chosen after a thorough bibliographic review of studies that focus on wordless books. The intent of the review was to provide an adequate framework for the development of students' critical thinking skills (Arizpe & Styles, 2003; Housen, 2002; Yenawine, 2013). The wordless books were selected according to certain criteria such as the age of children/research participants, the authenticity and persuasiveness of the story as well as the function of images (Giannikopoulou, 2008). It was also necessary stipulation that children should not know the wordless books, which have been published recently and have been distinguished by winning an international literature or best illustration award.

5. Methodology

5.1. Preparation, conduct of research

During the prosecution of the research, face-to-face and remote meetings were held with the principals, teachers and parents of the children who would participate in the research. Aiming to weighting the *C.T.S.E.T.* tool, identifying ambiguities and avoiding errors in the design of the main research (Barribeau, et al., 2012) a pilot study was carried out with students from another public primary school in Larissa, which did not participate in the main study.

The main research was completed in three phases: the pre-test, the educational invasion and the post-test (Cohen & Manion, 1997; Creswell, 2011). During the conduct in the main research children were divided into two groups (control and experimental), equally distributed, by the method of randomization without having been equalized in terms of their qualitative characteristics (Cohen & Manion, 1997; Creswell, 2011).

During the pre-test, children were asked to “read” the wordless book entitled *Journey* (Becker, 2018). Then they were asked to answer to five (5) comprehension questions of the book's content. The educational invasion followed. Children who participated in the experimental group were introduced to the basic elements of the Visual Arts, specifically the point, the line, the shape, the form, and the color. Besides they “read” the other two wordless books of Becker’s trilogy (*Quest* and *Return*) and they implemented creative reading activities in a playful form. Especially, the three (3) teaching hours of the Flexible Zone course were allocated every week in order to develop students’ critical thinking skills. The students of the experimental group and the class teacher implement twenty-five (25) activities. These activities were designed by the researcher and given to the class teacher as an educational material.

The main research was completed in three phases: the pre-test, the educational invasion and the post-test (Cohen & Manion, 1997; Creswell, 2011). During the conduct in the main research children were divided into two groups (control and experimental).

The post-test was conducted in the same way as the pre-test. In all phases of the research the interviews of the children/participants were recorded. The transcribed interviews -before and after- in response to the researcher's prompting questions composed the research material. In order to evaluate the performance of the groups in the main and the pilot research, it was applied the method of Content Analysis (Kyriazi, 1998; Lincoln & Cuba, 1985; Weber, 1990).

6. Results

6.1. Survey statistical analysis

The student performance of the two groups (control and experimental) was evaluated through statistical analysis. All analyzes were performed with the SPSS Statistics 26 statistical package and the level of significance was set at $p < .05$. First, a normal distribution test was applied using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test (K-S test) (Chakravarti, Laha & Roy, 1967) and a descriptive analysis of the data (means and standard deviations) was performed (Howitt & Cramer, 2011). The Means, the Standard Deviations, the Control of Normal Distribution through the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test and the positive or negative differences (Most extreme differences)

between the initial (Pre) and the final measurement (Post) of the examined variables are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Means, standard deviations, normal distribution test between the initial (pre) and the final measurement (post) in the examined variables.

	Mean ^a	Std Deviation ^a	Absolute ^b	Positive ^b	Negative ^b	Kolm Smirnov	Asymp.Sig (2-tailed)	N
I1_interpretation Pre	1,53	,879	,458	,458	-,275	5,019*	,000	120
I1_interpretation Post	1,79	,961	,378	,378	-,271	4,145*	,000	120
I2_analysis Pre	1,44	,786	,454	,454	-,287	4,979*	,000	120
I2_analysis Post	1,62	,881	,408	,408	-,242	4,470*	,000	120
I3_explanation Pre	1,50	,810	,432	,432	-,268	4,728*	,000	120
I3_explanation Post	1,72	,918	,382	,382	-,236	4,189*	,000	120
I4_inference Pre	2,08	,927	,307	,268	-,307	3,368*	,000	120
I4_inference Post	2,38	,918	,432	,251	-,432	4,736*	,000	120
I5_evaluation Pre	2,31	,933	,404	,245	-,404	4,427*	,000	120
I5_evaluation Post	2,53	,850	,470	,288	-,470	5,151*	,000	120

I. Indicator; a. Normal parameters: Test distribution is Normal/ Calculated from data; b. Most Extreme Differences * $p < ,001$

Because the data resulting from the normal distribution test through the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test (K-S test) did not follow the normal distribution ($p < .05$) a non-parametric test of two dependent samples (Wilcoxon test) (Howitt & Cramer, 2011) was applied separately for each intervention group (control and experimental) to investigate whether there were statistically significant differences between the initial (pre) and the final measurement (post) in terms of interpretation, analysis, explanation, implication and evaluation.

Especially, regarding the control group, the results of the Wilcoxon test showed that there were not statistically significant differences between the initial (pre) and the final measurement (post) in terms of the interpretation ($Z = -,856$, $p = ,392$), the analysis ($Z = -,841$, $p = ,401$), the explanation ($Z = -,368$, $p = ,713$), the inference ($Z = -,434$, $p = ,664$) and the evaluation ($Z = -,428$, $p = ,669$) (Table 2).

Table 2. Means, standard deviations, normal distribution test of the examined variables in the control group

	Mean ^a	Std Deviation ^a	Minimum	Maximum	Statistic z	Asymp.Sig (2-tailed)	N
I1_interpretation	1,52	,873	1	3	-,856 ^a	,392	60
I2_analysis	1,48	,792	1	3	-,841 ^b	,401	60
I3_explanation	1,45	,769	1	3	-,368 ^b	,713	60
I4_inference	2,03	,991	1	3	-,434 ^b	,664	60
I5_evaluation	2,20	,988	1	3	-,428 ^a	,669	60

I. indicator; a. Based on negative ranks; b. Based on positive ranks; c. Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test

On the contrary, regarding the experimental group, the results of the Wilcoxon test showed that there were statistically significant differences between the initial (pre) and the final measurement (post) in terms of interpretation ($Z = -2.056$, $p < .05$), analysis ($Z = -2.663$, $p < .05$), explanation ($Z = -2.549$, $p < .05$), inference ($Z = -3.974$, $p < .001$) and evaluation ($Z = -2.489$, $p < .05$). In all the above analyses, the experimental group had a higher score in the final measurement (post), after the implementation of the intervention program in comparison to the initial measurement (pre) (Table 3).

Table 3. Means, standard deviations, control of normal distribution of the examined variables in the experimental group

	Mean ^a	Std Deviation ^a	Minimum	Maximum	Statistic z	Asymp.Sig (2-tailed)	N
I1_interpretation	1,70	,926	1	3	-2,056 ^a	,040	60
I2_analysis	1,37	,712	1	3	-2,663 ^a	,008	60
I3_explanation	1,42	,720	1	3	-2,549 ^a	,011	60
I4_inference	1,95	,999	1	3	-3,974 ^a	,000	60
I5_evaluation	2,25	,968	1	3	-2,489 ^a	,013	60

I. indicator; a. Based on negative ranks; b. Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test

In order to investigate whether there were statistically significant differences between the experimental group and the control group in interpreting, analyzing, explaining, inferring and evaluating separately for each measure (pre, post), a non-parametric two-independent sample test was used. Specifically, the Mann-Whitney U test was used to investigate whether there were statistically significant differences between the two independent sample variables.

More specifically, regarding the initial measurement (pre), the results from the Mann-Whitney U test showed that there were no statistically significant differences in the interpretation ($U = 1792.00$, $p = .956$), the analysis ($U = 1677.50$, $p = .401$), the explanation ($U = 1716.00$, $p = .584$) the inference ($U = 1729.00$, $p = .684$) and the evaluation ($U = 1620.00$, $p = .263$) between the experimental group and the control group (Table 4).

Table 4. Differences between the performance of the control group and the experimental group in the initial measurement

	Mean ^a	Std Deviation ^a	Min	Max	Whitney U test ^a	Asymp.Sig (2-tailed)	N
I1_interpretation	1,52	,873	1	3			
control group_pre					1792,00	,956	60
I1_interpretation_ experimental group_pre	1,53	,892*	1	3			60
I2_analysis_ control group_pre	1,48	,792	1	3	1677,500	,401	60
I2_analysis_ experimental group_pre	1,40	,785*	1	3			60
I3_explanation_ control group_pre	1,45	,769	1	3	1716,000	,584	60
I3_explanation_ experimental group_pre	1,55	,852*	1	3			60
I4_inference_ control group_pre	2,03	,991	1	3	1729,000	,684	60
I4_inference_ experimental group_pre	2,12	,865***	1	3			60
I5_evaluation_ control group_pre	2,20	,988	1	3	1620,000	,263	60
I5_evaluation_ experimental group_pre	2,42	,869***	1	3			60

I. indicator; a. Grouping Variable: group* $p < ,05$ *** $p < ,001$

Regarding the final measurement (post), the results from the Mann-Whitney U test showed that there were statistically significant differences in the analysis ($U = 1324.00$ $p < .01$), the explanation ($U = 1249.00$ $p < .01$), the inference ($U = 1007.00$ $p < .001$) and the evaluation ($U = 1293.00$ $p < .001$) between the experimental group and the control group. Specifically, in the final measurement (post) the experimental group had a higher score in those indicators than the control group. Finally, there were no statistically significant differences in the interpretation ($U = 1637.50$ $p = .324$) between the experimental group and the control group (Table 5).

Table 5. Differences between the performance of the control group and the experimental group at the final measurement

	Mean ^a	Std Deviation ^a	Min	Max	Whitney U test ^a	Asymp.Sig (2-tailed)	N
I1_interpretation	1,70	,926	1	3			
control group_pre					1637,500	,324	60
I1_interpretation_experimental group_pre	1,88	,993*	1	3			60
I2_analysis	1,37	,712	1	3			
control group_pre					1324,000	,003	60
I2_analysis_experimental group_pre	1,87	,965*	1	3			60
I3_explanation	1,42	,720	1	3			
control group_pre					1249,000	,001	60
I3_explanation_experimental group_pre	2,02	,1000*	1	3			60
I4_inference	1,95	,999	1	3			
control group_pre					1007,000	,000	60
I4_inference_experimental group_pre	2,82	,567***	1	3			60
I5_evaluation	2,25	,968	1	3			
control group_pre					1293,000	,000	60
I5_evaluation_experimental group_pre	2,80	,605***	1	3			60

I. indicator; a. Grouping Variable: group* $p < ,05$ *** $p < ,001$

7. Conclusions

Evaluating the dialogues of First grade students it was found that the students of the experimental group compared to children in the control group scored better on the five (5) critical thinking assessment indicators (interpretation, analysis, explanation, inference, evaluation) (Housen, 2002; Pantaleo, 2017; Yenawine 2013).

Particularly, in accordance with the *C.T.S.E.T.* tool it was found that the performance of children in both the control and experimental groups did not show statistically significant differences on the five investigated critical thinking indicators before the implementation of the educational invasion (pre-test). On the contrary, obvious statistical differences were found in the performance of the children of the experimental group during the post-test. Final data of the survey proved the positive effect of the educational invasion that implements wordless books.

The comparative analysis of the two groups' performance showed that the children in the experimental group developed higher order critical thinking skills through providing teacher's

guidance and explicit instructions (Halpern, 2014; Law, 2012). In particular, it was found that the children met the requirements of the *C.T.S.E.T.* objectives. They were able to identify the key information of the image and predict the development of the book's story. Finally, they managed to identify the figurative elements in order to fully substantiate a point, conclusion or argument.

The survey results confirm the positive effect of the *C.T.S.E.T.* as a research tool in the development of children's critical thinking skills. The results demonstrate that the implementation of wordless books provides a strong motivation to integrate this kind of picture book into the educational process in order to develop children's critical thinking skills.

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Understanding and Text Properties: Investigating Readers' Sense-making Processes

Comprensión y propiedades textuales: investigar el proceso de interpretación del lector

Comprensió i propietats textuales: investigar el procés de interpretació del lector

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Abstract

Literary reading and the comprehension of literary text(s) have long been a key part of education. While reading comprehension in general has received a fair amount of attention, empirical research on comprehension processes of literary texts is still relatively rare. Yet, it is advisable to gain a thorough understanding of these processes, including potential difficulties and hurdles specific to the understanding of literary texts. To address this issue, we analyse such comprehension processes in a group of university students of English as a second language, drawing on a test based on Shakespeare's sonnet 43 which employs standardised, open-ended questions. Our research has two goals: firstly, to analyse readers' approaches that result in a more or less successful decoding of the text they are presented with, and, secondly, to explore whether different textual phenomena help or hinder understanding. We find that both strong and weak readers employ similar reading strategies; however, they differ in their literary response, with weak readers more likely to draw on irrelevant associations not warranted by the text. In addition, we show that some textual phenomena are more difficult to understand than others. Last, we discuss possible implications of our findings for teaching.

Key words: Literary comprehension, reader characteristics, textual phenomena, standardised test, Shakespeare.

Resumen

La lectura literaria y la comprensión de texto(s) literarios han sido durante mucho tiempo una parte clave de la educación. Aunque la comprensión lectora, en general, ha recibido bastante atención, la investigación empírica sobre los procesos de comprensión de textos literarios sigue siendo relativamente escasa. Sin embargo, es recomendable obtener una comprensión completa de estos procesos, incluyendo posibles dificultades y obstáculos específicos para la comprensión de textos

literarios. Para abordar este problema, analizamos dichos procesos de comprensión en un grupo de estudiantes universitarios de inglés como segunda lengua, utilizando una prueba basada en el soneto 43 de Shakespeare que emplea preguntas estandarizadas y abiertas. Nuestra investigación tiene dos objetivos: en primer lugar, analizar los enfoques de las personas lectoras que resultan en una decodificación más o menos exitosa del texto que se les presenta; y, en segundo lugar, explorar si diferentes fenómenos textuales ayudan o dificultan la comprensión. Descubrimos que tanto lectores fuertes como débiles emplean estrategias de lectura similares; sin embargo, difieren en su respuesta literaria, siendo más probable que los lectores débiles recurran a asociaciones irrelevantes no justificadas por el texto. Además, mostramos que algunos fenómenos textuales son más difíciles de entender que otros. Por último, discutimos posibles implicaciones de nuestros hallazgos para la enseñanza.

Palabras clave: Comprensión literaria, características del lector, fenómenos textuales, prueba estandarizada, Shakespeare.

Resum

La lectura literària i la comprensió dels textos literaris han sigut durant molt de temps una part clau de l'educació. Tot i que la comprensió lectora en general ha rebut una quantitat considerable d'atenció, la recerca empírica sobre els processos de comprensió dels textos literaris encara és relativament poc comuna. No obstant això, és aconsellable obtenir una comprensió a fons d'aquests processos, incloent-hi possibles dificultats i obstacles específics per a la comprensió dels textos literaris. Per abordar aquest problema, analitzem aquests processos de comprensió en un grup d'estudiants universitaris d'anglès com a segona llengua, fent servir una prova basada en el sonet 43 de Shakespeare que utilitza preguntes estandarditzades i obertes. La nostra recerca té dos objectius: en primer lloc, analitzar els enfocaments dels lectors que donen lloc a una descodificació més o menys reeixida del text que se'ls presenta; i, en segon lloc, explorar si diferents fenòmens textuais ajuden o obstaculitzen la comprensió. Descubrim que tant els lectors forts com els febles utilitzen estratègies de lectura similars; no obstant això, difereixen en la seua resposta literària, amb els lectors febles més propensos a recórrer a associacions irrellevants no justificades pel text. A més, mostrem que alguns fenòmens textuais són més difícils de comprendre que d'altres. Finalment, discutim les possibles implicacions dels nostres resultats per a la docència.

Paraules clau: Comprensió literària, característiques del lector, fenòmens textuais, prova estandarditzada, Shakespeare.

1. Introduction

The comprehension of literary texts has been an integral part of education for a long time. While there is a large amount of research on text comprehension in general (see, e.g., Fox & Alexander, 2009; Kintsch, 1998, for a cognition perspective; Leslie & Caldwell, 2009), there are far fewer studies (empirical ones in particular) of the understanding of literary texts specifically (Miall, 2006, though see, e.g., Hall, 2015; Kramsch, 1985; Paran, 2008; Witte et al., 2012 for examples of the few existing empirical studies on the topic). It is crucial, however, to develop a comprehensive understanding of these processes, including potential challenges unique to literary texts. To address this gap, our study investigates the comprehension processes of a group of university students studying English as a second language. Our research aims to achieve two primary objectives: first, to analyse readers' strategies that impact the effectiveness of decoding the presented text, and second, to investigate how various textual elements either aid or impede comprehension.

2. Background

2.1 Literary text comprehension

Literary and non-literary texts share many properties which shape understanding processes. The literary features of a text, as evident in its style and textual phenomena, sit along a continuum rather than adhering to a binary classification. However, literary texts do tend to differ from factual texts in the complexity of their linguistic makeup and the density of stylistic devices. This also includes textual phenomena such as ambiguity, paradoxes or metaphors.

In our paper, we hence focus on literary texts which provide us with intriguing research material based on their complexity: they pose challenges to their readers on the levels of language and style. Poetry in particular poses an additional challenge as poems generally lack context, which requires readers to process the linguistic information differently and more carefully than when reading a factual text.

In our paper, we hence focus on literary texts which provide us with intriguing research material based on their complexity: they pose challenges to their readers on the levels of language and style. Poetry in particular poses an additional challenge as poems generally lack context, which requires readers to process the linguistic information differently and more carefully than when reading a factual text.

Our research project at Tübingen University in Germany focusses on learning more about the particular competences needed for the comprehension of literary texts. The case study presented in the following section(s) is based on a standardised comprehension test of Shakespeare's Sonnet 43

given to students of English as a second language (for details on the group, see section 1.4)¹. The text and the tasks presented to the students are in Appendix I. Prior to our own study, a quantitative study was undertaken based on the same test but with a different participant sample (Bauer, Glaesser, Kelava, Kirchhoff, and Zirker, 2022; see section 1.3)². In this paper, we present the results of qualitative analyses of the student responses to the same tasks obtained later from a different set of students comprising 70 respondents. The quantitative results provided insights concerning the association of text comprehension with student characteristics such as reading habits, prior experiences of studying Shakespeare and time spent in English-speaking countries as well as an analysis of the psychometric properties of the test. The short open answers to standardised questions lend themselves to an additional qualitative analysis in order to gain further insights into comprehension processes. Building upon the insights of Bierwisch (2012) and Klein (1977), who argue that the interpretation of poetry transcends mere analysis of text properties, emphasising its impact on the reader, our approach acknowledges that comprehension results from the intricate interplay between text attributes and the reader's predisposition. We assume that characteristics of the reader and the text both influence comprehension processes. Additionally, we draw insights from Witte et al.'s (2012) empirical study, which focuses on Dutch educators who, much like their global counterparts, are successful in teaching average students but encounter challenges when supporting diverse students, particularly in literary understanding. Recognising their limitations in identifying and classifying variations in student capabilities, Witte et al. (2012) aimed to establish an empirical framework that serves as a literary reference guide. To contribute to the existing research and to address the intricate interplay between text characteristics and readers' predispositions, our paper formulates a dual-pronged strategy: we firstly focus on how strong and weak readers (in the sense of how well they have understood the text) differ in the strategies they employ in their reading (see section 2), and, secondly, on properties of the text itself (section 3). Before presenting the results of these two parts of our analysis, we describe the text and the test based on it (section 1.2). We then provide a summary of the quantitative findings from the previous study (Bauer et al., 2022, section 1.3), followed by the description of the sample of students who participated in the present study and our approach to the analysis (section 1.4). We conclude with a discussion of our findings (section 4).

¹ The fact that the students were not native speakers of English obviously may affect the results; in particular, they may have struggled more with unknown vocabulary and phrasing. Against that, however, they are likely to have had a considerable amount of exposure to English-language literary texts through their studies, possibly more so than some native speakers of English who have not studied language and literature to the same extent. Either way, it would be interesting to see our approach applied to native speakers and readers from a diverse set of backgrounds.

² Details of the project members and the funding agency will be provided here once anonymous peer review has been completed.

2.2. Material: Shakespeare's sonnet 43

Shakespeare's sonnet 43 was chosen as the literary text underlying our test for several reasons. Poems are suitable for our purpose because they are relatively short and thus allow for the use of a full text rather than excerpts in a test situation. Moreover, they often contain a wide range of textual phenomena within their compact form. Sonnet 43 (reproduced in full in Appendix I) displays these properties, which pose challenges to understanding particularly for contemporary readers, as we shall

Poems are suitable for our purpose because they are relatively short and thus allow for the use of a full text rather than excerpts in a test situation.

see³. Based on the sonnet, a test comprising 15 items (Appendix I) was created. The items were standardised, i.e. all respondents received the same items in an open or constructed response format. In contrast to multiple choice questions, constructed response items induce test-takers to phrase their own answers to the questions and do not provide any preconceived answers that can be selected. While this increases the burden on test assessors, it also greatly increases the items' validity, given that they reflect the respondents' own thoughts. Another advantage is that, unlike multiple choice items, arriving at the correct answer by mere guessing is impossible (see Rupp et al., 2006). For our purposes, another key advantage is that constructed response items can be analysed qualitatively, thus offering additional insights into respondents' understanding processes.

The first group of items, focusing on line 1, aims at directly assessing understanding as well as gaining some insight into respondents' sense-making processes. The second group, addressing lines 5-6, explores the relationship between understanding specific expressions and the lines as a whole. The third group, with a focus on lines 13-14, investigates the understanding of the lines as well as the poem as a whole, that is, the move from a local to a global understanding of the text. 12 of the 15 items were considered in the final score, the other three items (1.2, 1.4 and 3.2) served to prime respondents for the following items. Students' responses were scored following a detailed answer scheme developed by the literary scholars among the test's authors who are experts on early modern English literature. Ambiguous answers were discussed with other team members until consensus was reached.

2.3. Previous research: quantitative findings

³ For more details on how the sonnet was chosen and on the rationale for test construction see Bauer et al. (2022).

An earlier quantitative study based on the test described above involved 430 students from three universities (Bauer et al., 2022). Nearly 60 percent of them were studying for a teaching degree, with the remainder pursuing a different course such as a BA or MA in English literature. Most of the participants studied a second subject alongside English; these second subjects were varied and included, among others, history, biology, German, other foreign languages, and sports. They had been studying for a period between one and thirteen semesters, with the majority (101 respondents, 23.5%) in their second semester. Bauer et al. (2022) found that the test showed satisfactory psychometric properties in terms of internal consistency and reliability. They also established its external validity by assessing the extent to which relevant respondent characteristics predicted test performance. They analysed the ability to reflect on one's own understanding by exploring the responses to items 1.4/1.5 and 3.2/3.3. Items 1.4 and 3.2 ask "Does the line make sense to you?", referring to lines 1 and 13 respectively. Items 1.5 and 3.3 then ask "If it [the line] doesn't make sense to you, please say what causes the difficulty. If it does make sense, please explain how you worked it out". In their answers, participants drew on context, noted an awareness of stylistic figures and literary conventions, as well as their knowledge of syntax and general world knowledge. Paraphrasing was sometimes used as a strategy. The main obstacles to understanding were a lack of relevant vocabulary, an overly complex sentence structure on the level of language, and struggles with a paradox (Bauer et al., 2022).

The current study builds on these insights by extending the research to a qualitative analysis of a sample of new respondents' characteristics and followed by an analysis of properties of the text. Respondents' characteristics and textual properties jointly contribute to understanding or a lack thereof. In the next section, we describe this new sample, and outline our approach to the analysis.

2.4. The present study: participants and coding

The test described in section 1.2 was taken by 70 respondents. Their overall backgrounds are very similar to the 430 participants described in section 1.3 (and in Bauer et al., 2022) in terms of their studies. However, they were slightly further advanced in their studies, with the majority in their third or fifth semester. Similar to the larger group of 430, responses were evaluated for overall correctness, and scores ranging from 0 to 10 were recorded, with a maximum possible score of 12. Following this quantitative assessment, we coded each individual response using the data analysis program ATLAS.ti, version 22.1.3.0 (Atlas.ti, 2022). The purpose of this coding process was to document and categorise any statements made by the students which provide information about their steps in the reading process, their interpretative approaches, difficulties in understanding, reading strategies and thought

processes. The resulting codes form the basis for the analyses presented in sections 2 and 3 (see Table 1 for a list of all codes). We accordingly documented all aspects of the students' reading process, irrespective of whether it was an instance of not-understanding, understanding, or simply reflections on the nature of the text at hand.

Some of the code categories were determined beforehand based on the aims of the survey, which were to reveal specific aspects of the students' comprehension processes⁴. Other categories were added or modified throughout the mark-up process, depending on what the students wrote in their answers in an inductive analytic process. After the initial coding rounds, the documents were checked again for further passages to which codes may apply that were added at a later stage of the mark-up process; we added the codes retrospectively wherever appropriate⁵. Appendix II provides details on the rationale behind the coding.

Subsequently, given our interest in reading strategies, we divided all codes into two groups, regardless of whether they had been determined beforehand or whether they had been derived during the inductive process: firstly, those that relate to the students' reading process and, secondly, those that refer to their literary response. While the reading process codes are related to reading more generally, the literary response codes mark those statements that reflect reactions specific to the nature of the textual material at hand. Thus, both code groups focus on the reader's behaviour, but the first encompasses general reading behaviour, whereas the second refers to the reader's response to the literary text at hand. There are three codes (hypothesis, text analysis, problem solving) that we assigned to both groups. Certain overlaps between the code groups were to be expected as we were dealing with the products of a comprehension process that requires readers to use basic comprehension skills and, simultaneously, to consider how the particular nature of the text affects this process. Table 1 provides a list of the codes and their definitions along with examples and information on which code group they were allocated to.

⁴ The questions in the survey are based on the assumption, founded in linguistics, that reading is an interplay between applying linguistic knowledge (of words, syntax, semantics) and determining how pragmatic principles are used in the text, i.e. identifying implicatures (Zirker, Glaesser, Kelava, & Bauer, 2018, p. 159).

⁵ We also used the software, which can generate a list of those words that appear most frequently in the individual codes, to verify the accuracy of our code categories. We expected the code "(evaluative) comment on: text composition" to include words, such as "repetitions" and "word play", that are likely to occur when talking about the composition of sonnet 43. Our expectations were confirmed: for example, the code "(evaluative) comment on: text composition" yielded the following words: word (23), meaning (15), shadow (14), repetition (13), whereas the code "problem solving" yielded the words: meaning (9), line (9), sense (7), sentence (5).

Code Name	Code Definition	Example	Code group
Ambiguity +	Recognising, highlighting and/or discussing ambiguity with regard to its possible meaning(s) in the sonnet	N/N/V/Adj/V (maybe N; I am not quite sure) (response to task 2.1.: asks students to name the word classes of the words in line 6: “shadow’s form form happy show”)	“reading process“
Ambiguity -	Not recognising ambiguity or not discussing ambiguity where it is present in the text	I think it is clear what the speaker means. (response to task 1.1.: concerns the ambiguity in line 1 of the sonnet (“When most I wink, then do mine eyes best see”))	
Realisation +	Knowledge growth through analysis, drawing conclusions (e.g. text elements are put in context) based on text analysis	He is talking about dreaming. (response to task 1.5.: concerns the paradox in line 1 of the sonnet (“When most I wink, then do mine eyes best see”))	
Realisation -	Drawing conclusions that are not supported by sonnet’s context, supposed understanding, expressing confusion about the meaning of a line	I don’t understand why he should see better if he winks his eyes. (response to task 1.5.: concerns the paradox in line 1 of the sonnet (“When most I wink, then do mine eyes best see”))	
Reflection on +	Reflecting on own understanding processes, self-monitoring, reflecting on context in which utterance in question was made	Paradoxically he is saying he can see most clearly when his eyes are closed the most, so when he is sleeping. This becomes clear by reading the rest of the poem with the motive of day and night. (response to task 1.5.: concerns the paradox in line 1 of the sonnet (“When most I wink, then do mine eyes best see”))	
Reflection on -	Understanding processes are not reflected upon even though this is supposed to be part of the response	I think the [sic] have a similar meaning and increase each other’s meaning. (response to task 2.3.: asks the words “shadow shadows” in line 5 (“shadow shadows doth make bright”) have the same meaning)	

Hypothesis	Establishing a hypothesis about the possible meaning(s) of the utterances made in the text	It probably is a reference to him missing his beloved and to be closer to her he closes his eyes and thinks of her. (response to the last task, 3.4.: asks students to go back to line 1 and state how it makes sense in the context of the poem)	both categories: "reading process" and "literary response"
Text analysis	Analysis of text elements and their relationship to each other	It is a paradox [sic] relation because usually one cannot see best while winking. (response to task 1.1.: concerns the paradox in line 1 of the sonnet ("When most I wink, then do mine eyes best see"))	
Problem solving	Descriptions of problem-solving strategies	After I translated the sentence, it made sense as a metaphor. (response to task 3.3.: asks students to explain how they made sense of lines 13-14 ("All days are nights to see till I see thee, / And nights bright days when dreams do show thee me."))	
Generalisation	Interpretations outside the text, overgeneralisations, general statements or inferences based on (inadequate) evidence from the poem	It is about seeing/not seeing/seeing only shadows or in dreams. It is about love and how the loved one is SEEN. (response to the last task, 3.4.: asks students to go back to line 1 and state how it makes sense in the context of the poem)	"literary response"
Personal associations	Meaning of word and phrases for the reader, does not necessarily coincide with meaning of the word in sonnet's context	It makes sense for me because for example [sic] my dad is wearing glasses and sometimes he winks more often to see something clear. (response to task 1.5.: concerns the paradox in line 1 of the sonnet("When most I wink, then do mine eyes best see"))	

(Evaluative) comment on: approach to literary text	Any comment regarding the question how to approach a literary text to make sense of it	In most poems there is not just one right meaning. Each of us reads it differently and associates different things. (response to task 1.3.: concerns the meaning of line 1 (“When most I wink, then do mine eyes best see”))
(Evaluative) comment on: text composition	Any comments concerning the text composition and the author’s skills	The syntax seems off and the [sic] are words of the same form but with different [sic] meaning or even exactly the same word [sic] right next to each other. This makes the poem very difficult to read but also intriguing. (response to task 2.6.: asks students what is striking about lines 5-6 (“Then thou, whose shadow shadows doth make bright, / How would thy shadow’s form form happy show”))

Table 1. Codes and their groups

3. Strong and weak readers

As noted above, respondents scored between 0 and 10 points on the comprehension test. This part of the analysis focuses on the differences in approach between those who scored highly on the test compared with the others. Accordingly, we grouped them as weak readers and strong readers, with the former comprising those who scored between 0 and 7 points and the latter 8 to 10 points⁶. We assume that the two groups differ with regard to their reading processes and strategies that are applied to understand the text. Investigating these differences can help provide insights into specific comprehension processes. Accordingly, we were interested in potential distinctions in both the reading process codes and the literary response codes between the groups. Given that the overall score in the survey constitutes a measure of how well the student has understood the text, it is plausible that the processes through which the results were achieved vary between the groups, which is why we employ this differentiation.

For the analysis, we first examined the total number of specific codes given⁷. Next, we compared how often the codes from the “reading process” group were assigned. In Table 2, we show how many times a code was given on responses from “weak readers” and how many times to “strong readers”. For each group, we have ordered the resulting list of codes so that the most frequent codes are at the top of the table. In other words, we present a rank order of codes so that within each group of readers – weak and strong – the most common codes for that group are at the top of the table and the least common ones at the bottom. The reason for relying largely on rank orders rather than relative frequencies/proportions of codes within each group is that the latter can be misleading because the two groups are uneven in size. Reporting the proportion of each group within a code would be misleading. We have, however, provided the percentages of codes. The comparison of the “reading process”-code shows that the differences between these two groups of students are only marginal, regardless of whether rank order or percentages are considered.

⁶ 12 points was the maximum on this test. Respondents scoring at least 8 are those solving at least two thirds of the items correctly, placing them well above average performance. A lower cut-off would have made the characterisation of the top group as “strong readers” questionable.

⁷ Since a code is assigned to a response or part of a response, and since more than one code can be assigned to the same (part of a) response, the number of codes exceeds the number of respondents and the number of tasks.

Weak readers (58 respondents)		Strong readers (12 respondents)	
Realisation -: Language	197 (24.94%)	Realisation +: Language	51 (24.88%)
Realisation +: Language	132 (16.71%)	Hypothesis	32 (15.61%)
Hypothesis	104 (13.16%)	Text analysis	24 (11.71%)
Ambiguity -	58 (7.34%)	Realisation -: Language	22 (10.73%)
Realisation -: Context	50 (6.33%)	Ambiguity -	16 (7.80%)
Text analysis	47 (5.95%)	Realisation +: Context	16 (7.80%)
Realisation +: Context	44 (5.57%)	Reflection on +: Context	12 (5.85%)
Reflection on -: Language	41 (5.19%)	Reflection on +: Language	11 (5.37%)
Reflection on -: Context	37 (4.68%)	Reflection on -: Language	7 (3.41%)
Reflection on +: Language	32 (4.05%)	Realisation -: Context	5 (2.44%)
Reflection on +: Context	26 (3.29%)	Reflection on -: Context	5 (2.44%)
Problem solving	21 (2.66%)	Problem solving	4 (1.95%)
Ambiguity +	1 (0.13%)	Ambiguity +	0 (0%)

Table 2. Reading process codes, frequencies within performance groups

The fact that the differences between the two performances are only minor suggests that the students, irrespective of their competence levels, show similar reading behaviours, yet, apparently, with differing degrees of success, otherwise the group of strong readers would not have solved more tasks correctly. Moreover, the results also suggest that these codes are no direct indicators of students' literary competence; in other words, the general approach to reading – as opposed to specific strategies applied to literary phenomena – is the same for the group. Given that all our respondents are university students, it is perhaps not surprising that they have all developed similar general reading strategies. We have designated them as strong and weak readers in the context of our investigation, but in a different sense they are all strong readers, of course, given their level of education and their choice of university subject.

The fact that the differences between the two performances are only minor suggests that the students, irrespective of their competence levels, show similar reading behaviours, yet, apparently, with differing degrees of success, otherwise the group of strong readers would not have solved more tasks correctly.

We now turn to the more specific reading processes employed in the context of a literary text. Here, we do find some differences between the two groups, as can be seen in Table 3. Again, we present rank orders of codes and percentages within groups, as in the comparison of reading process codes.

Weak readers (58 respondents)		Strong readers (12 respondents)	
Personal association	46 (41.07%)	Generalisation	14 (46.67%)
Generalisation	45 (40.18%)	(Evaluative) comment on: text composition	9 (30%)
(Evaluative) comment on: approach to literary texts	15 (13.39%)	Personal association	7 (23.33%)
(Evaluative) comment on: text composition	6 (5.36%)	(Evaluative) comment on: approach to literary texts	0 (0%)

Table 3. Literary response, frequencies within performance groups

The strong performance group does not make any (evaluative) comments on possible approaches to literary texts, whereas in the weak group this is the third most common code. The personal association-code is also more typical of the weak performance group. Evaluative comments on text composition are the second most common code in the strong group and the rarest in the weak group. The results, therefore, suggest that the codes “(evaluative) comment on: approach to literary texts” and “personal association”, may, in the context of this specific survey, be said to be associated with lower competence levels, whereas the code “(evaluative) comment on: text composition” is more likely to be linked to higher competence levels.

A closer analysis of the students' statements in the passage coded with the “(evaluative) comment on: approach to literary texts” reveals, for example, that the students hardly answer the question in the task; rather, they comment on the fact that “poetry is hard” or that “it is a poem and everyone interprets poems differently”. It seems that, as a consequence of their own insecurity regarding the meaning of the line, the students often ignore the task altogether and come up with all sorts of responses. The code group “(evaluative) comment on: approach to literary texts”, therefore, mostly tags passages in which students avoid engaging with the text and making sense of it by stating what they should be doing or what they think makes the attempt to understand the sonnet futile. By contrast, a closer analysis of the statements coded with the “(evaluative) comment on: text composition”-code reveals that the tagged passages are often comments concerned with the fact that the elements in the sonnet are deliberately structured and phrased in a certain manner. Noting the text's striking use of language may have helped the students realise that, although, for example, Shakespeare's wordplay may be hard to understand at first, it nevertheless serves a communicative purpose – and that it is the reader's task to investigate their possible meaning(s) in the context of the sonnet.

Given the relatively small sample size, only further investigations can reliably confirm these tendencies. The results nevertheless allow for one conclusion: the difference between the results from

the two code groups suggests that the manner in which the students respond to the sonnet affects the outcome of their comprehension process.

This observation confirms the hypothesis that literary texts have specific properties that need to be taken into account when researching text comprehension and, thus, supports the notion stated at the beginning of this investigation: research on literary understanding requires an adequate consideration of the reading material (see, e.g., Frederking, 2010; Meier et al., 2017, 56).

Our focus in this section was on readers' characteristics, more specifically, their understanding processes in general and their literary responses in particular. We now turn to properties of the text which may aid or hinder comprehension.

4. Textual phenomena

The five textual phenomena which can be identified in Sonnet 43 and underlie our test are ambiguity, metaphor, oxymoron, paradox and polyptoton. As noted above, the density of such phenomena tends to be greater in poems because they are a powerful means to say "much in little" (Bauer, 2012, p. 160); this may contribute to the genre's enigmatic qualities and makes poems more challenging to understand. In this paper, we focus on two of the textual phenomena: the paradox in line 1 (referred to in task 1) and the metaphor in lines 13-14 (referred to in task 3). Both are commonly encountered in literary, as well as non-literary texts, and may hence be familiar to readers. The tasks contain questions which specifically ask students to reflect on as well as document (in writing) their own understanding process. The student responses to the tasks can thus be evaluated with regard to the textual phenomena they refer to. This approach allows us to investigate whether specific text features trigger certain comprehension processes. In sections 3.1 and 3.2, we analyse weak and strong readers together, returning to the distinction in section 3.3.

4.1 Making sense of paradox and metaphor

To begin with, we observe unexpectedly diverse responses for item 1.1, especially given the straightforward nature of the question (What is the relationship between part 1 of the line, 'When most I wink,' and part 2, 'then do mine eyes best see?'), which should hardly result in answers beyond those related to textual analysis. However, the students were apparently struggling to make sense of this line. In fact, despite their concern with the linguistic aspects of the utterance – the students mention a set of different problems mostly on the syntactical and lexical level –, they rarely noticed that the statement in the first line is contradictory and can only be explained when reading on: while most of the students correctly identified the metaphor in lines 13-14, only 12 out of 70 students

correctly identified the (apparent) paradox in line 1. In this context, it should also be noted that the fact that the paradox is resolved in the consecutive two lines should neither be considered a reason why students chose not to comment on it nor a factor that diminishes its importance for understanding the rest of the poem. On the contrary, the argumentative structure of the sonnet makes the first statement a plausible “expression of the speaker’s relationship with the addressee” (Bauer et al., 2022: 5). It is therefore particularly important to identify the paradox because it enables readers to discuss the meaning of the first line in relation to the interpretation of the rest of the poem.

This first observation is crucial as it reconfirms the importance of a thorough textual analysis preceding an attempt at interpretation. The student answers suggest that, whenever they are struggling to make sense of an utterance, they tend to resort to (inappropriate) remedial strategies that they think can help them resolve the issues encountered. The question is why their responses tend to diverge more when they come across a difficult passage than an easy one, even though the survey question asks them for an analysis of the passage that is supposed to help them find the cause of their problem in understanding. The lack of context may be one reason why respondents struggle to make sense of the utterances in the poem⁸. Unlike factual texts, fictional texts lack context in which to situate utterances, and the only clues as regards the meaning of an utterance are provided in the text itself⁹. In this context, Eco emphasises the significance of abduction (inference to the best explanation) in the interpretation process and proposes that interpreting signs entails formulating hypotheses and selecting the most plausible ones based on available evidence¹⁰ (Eco 1992, 65). The objective of

⁸ It makes sense here to include a short note on Iser’s 1974 book titled *The Implied Reader* in which he writes about reader responses to fictional texts. Central to Iser’s approach is a keen emphasis on the reader’s role in deciphering what remains unspoken in the text yet is possibly suggested (Iser *The Implied Reader* 274f). He thus introduces the idea of ‘gaps’ within the text, but, while still supported in literary studies, this is a somewhat vague concept. The definition of these ‘gaps’ is not based on a solid theoretical framework, such as, for example, pragmatic studies and the concept of implicatures. Instead, it appears that the determination of these ‘gaps’ relies on the individual researcher’s or reader’s subjective interpretation alone. One must therefore exercise due caution when considering Iser’s approach in literary analysis. A similar critique can be put forward against Rosenblatt who describes literary experience as “a circular process” during which “the reader responds to the verbal stimuli offered by the text, but at the same time ... draw[s] selectively on the resources of his own fund of experiences and sensibility to provide and organize the substance of his response” (Rosenblatt 1978: 43). In a manner similar to Iser, Rosenblatt places considerable emphasis on the reader’s role and overlooks the central importance of textual evidence as the primary point of reference. In this article, we aim to discuss the split between the reader’s subjective interpretations or free associations and the text’s semantic and pragmatic meaning (s. below).

⁹ To be precise, non-fictional texts are based on real-life events, and its readers can refer to additional sources in case of uncertainties and in order to disambiguate certain statements. Fictional texts, however, do not depend on the factuality of what they refer to and can therefore be considered a “self-contained unit” (cf. Bauer et al., 2020: 201). This independence requires readers to pay close attention to the poem’s language and how each meaningful unit contributes to the meaning of the whole (cf. Bauer et al., 2020: 201, 212; cf. also Bauer and Brockmann 2017).

¹⁰ See also Fishelov, who, based on the “ratio between textual details from various phonetic, syntactic and semantic levels, and explicit or implicit assumptions that we use in order to explain these details”,

understanding a fictional text therefore lies in discussing the textual evidence with regard to its possible meanings. However, while the information the text provides should be sufficient, it can still be challenging to figure out how the different units of meaning in the poem contribute to the meaning of the text as a whole (and vice versa). The complexity of this process becomes evident in the various remedial strategies the respondents employ to make up for the lack of context. For example, they try to establish a context themselves by drawing on subjective associations with certain words. While this strategy may be helpful when dealing with a factual text, in a fictional text, personal associations, e.g. with word meanings, can distract from a thorough analysis of what the actual utterance context of the linguistic expression (here, the sonnet) tells us about the meaning of the utterance. Consequently, the students end up proposing an explanation that has little to do with what the text actually says. For example, one student writes “[y]ou normally wink often when you are crying, therefore you can interpret it as the lyrical subject can see the truth, or clear [sic] when they are hurt.” Another strategy they resort to is trying to make the answer more specific by explaining how the utterance may apply to a situation in their own world. These interpretations are, however, often not warranted by the text. For example, one student responds to item 1.1 that “[y]ou draw energy for the following days. Through dreams our dark rooms can be bright.” We coded expressions of these two strategies as “personal association”. The two examples draw attention to the fact that there are two different kinds of knowledge that interact with each other during the reading process: the knowledge readers bring to the text and the knowledge they acquire from reading it. It can be challenging not to let pre-existing knowledge about certain words and situations influence how we understand texts. Hence, understanding the significance of context and how it affects word comprehension, especially when reading fictional texts, is a critical aspect of literary studies¹¹. Considering that there are more “personal association” codes for the paradox (see Figure 1) than the metaphor, we can assume that the students were struggling with the paradox in particular, making them rely more on their personal associations with the words rather than conduct a thorough analysis of the language.

The student answers suggest that, whenever they are struggling to make sense of an utterance, they tend to resort to (inappropriate) remedial strategies that they think can help them resolve the issues encountered.

distinguishes between economical and uneconomical interpretations (32f). While an economical interpretation “succeeds in explaining many textual details while using only a few, simple assumptions”, an uneconomical interpretation “develops a complicated set of assumptions to explain only a few textual details” (Fishelov 2012/13: 32).

¹¹ See also Meek’s monograph *How Texts Teach What Readers Learn* where she explores various ways in which texts impact and mould readers’ comprehension and knowledge.

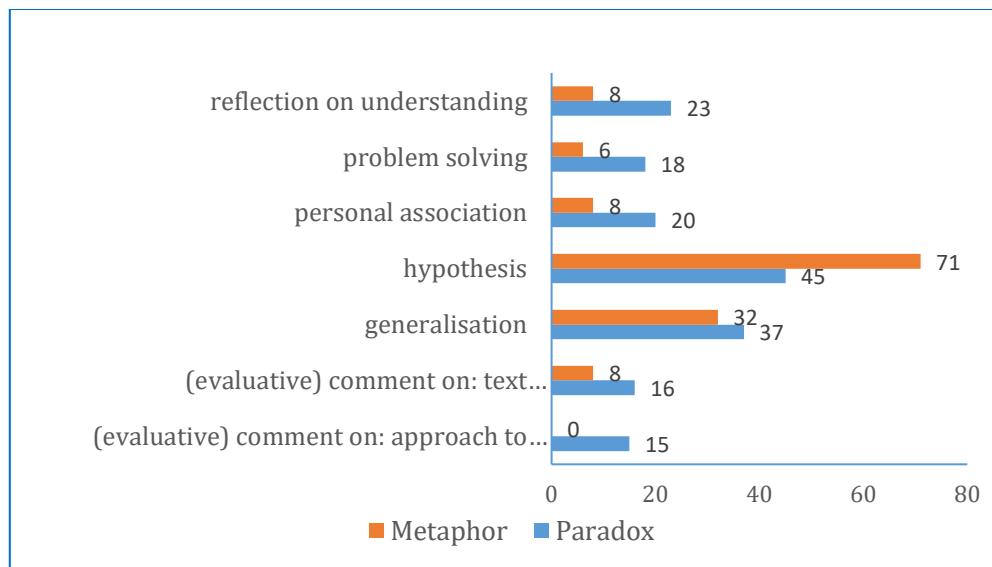


Figure 1. Distribution of “literary response”-codes for the textual phenomena metaphor and paradox

4.2 Reflection on one’s own understanding

Items 1.5 and 3.3 contain the same question applied to lines 1 and 13/14, respectively: respondents were asked to provide reasons as to why they thought they had understood this specific part of the sonnet or not. Again, we found that the students responded differently to the two phenomena. While 15 of the 21 codes appear with more or less equal frequency in responses to both items, four codes show considerable differences. These codes are explanation, hypothesis, problem solving, and reflection on understanding. A comparison of the results can be seen in Table 4.

Codes	Item 1.5	Item 3.3
Explanation	16 (28.57%)	8 (21.05%)
Hypothesis	7 (12.50%)	17 (44.74%)
Problem solving	15 (26.79%)	6 (15.79%)
Reflection on understanding	18 (32.14%)	7 (18.42%)

Table 4. Codes for items 1.5 and 3.3

We decided to analyse the respective responses in more detail and considered the answers to the items. We find that respondents report different strategies when making sense of the first line in contrast to reading the final two lines of the poem. In item 1.5, the students name five different strategies: they looked at the context, tried to re-structure the phrase, re-read the lines several times and tried to parse them word-by-word, translated the lines, and applied different forms of knowledge (lexical and world knowledge). Although the students claim that these strategies helped them make sense of the first line, they make fewer statements about what the line actually means. This is noteworthy as, in item 3.3, which asks the exact same question, the students list one strategy only, namely translation or paraphrase (again, we came to this conclusion by analysing the quotes directly)

and, more often, simply respond with a paraphrase of the lines rather than describing how they made sense of them.

Taken together, these differences in approaches to task 1 and task 3 suggest that the students were indeed less confident about the meaning of line 1 than the meaning of lines 13-14. In fact, their insecurity may have been the reason why they decided to reflect on their approach to the line/sonnet again rather than confirming their understanding of the line by paraphrasing it. Another explanation could be that a certain learning effect has taken place by the time the students arrive at task 3. We can assume that by then they will have read the sonnet several times and may have come to a general understanding of the sonnet's rhetoric. Nevertheless, the fact that hardly any of the students notice the (apparent) paradox in the first line as opposed to the metaphor in the couplet not only confirms our assumption that the students are struggling more with the paradoxical first line, but it also allows for another conclusion. It seems that knowing which aspect of the text makes understanding difficult can help during the comprehension process. Although our observations alone can hardly be considered reliable indicators that the students were struggling more with the paradox than with the metaphor, it nevertheless supports the notion that the metaphor may have posed less of a comprehension difficulty.

4.3 Paradox, metaphor, and readers' performance level

We would like to conclude this section with a brief comment on the relationship between readers' performance level and textual phenomena: the "personal association" code, as well as the "(evaluative) comment on: approach to literary texts" code, appear with higher frequency in the responses to the tasks concerned with the paradox. As we have shown in the first part of the analysis, both codes are associated with lower performance. These observations support the notion that, in this poem at least, the paradox poses more of a comprehension problem than the metaphor (this observation is borne out by the fact that the quantitative part of the survey showed that there are more correct responses on Task 3.1 (67%) than on Task 1.1 (56%)). In addition, they reveal an aspect of literary text comprehension that requires further investigation: when encountering a difficult passage¹², the students are much more likely to resort to remedial strategies that can lead to inappropriate and implausible interpretations when reading a literary text.

¹² In the case of the paradox, the difficulty is that the students are confronted with a self-contradictory statement that requires a thorough analysis of the context to be proven well-founded and actually logical.

5. Conclusion

Reading literary texts (and poetry, in particular) can be a particularly rewarding experience in many different ways. At the same time, however, their comprehension may pose challenges to readers. Therefore, it is important for researchers in the field to understand these challenges as a first step towards teaching this level of comprehension (more) successfully. With this goal in mind, we have presented an analysis of university students' responses to Shakespeare's sonnet 43 that were given in a standardised test of the understanding of this sonnet. It has proven fruitful to employ open-ended answers to standardised questions, since they allow for quantitative analyses (reported in Bauer et al., 2022, and summarised in this paper) as well as the qualitative analysis presented here. We were able to show that there are qualitative differences in the approaches of strong and weak readers. The former appeared to understand the poem better by employing strategies such as paying attention to textual features (as indicated by the code "(evaluative) comment on: text composition"), whereas the latter drew on their personal experience and generalised statements on the reading of literary texts which proved to be less helpful in understanding the text. Thus, our study has shown how important it is to be aware of the function of specific words, phrases and expressions, even or especially if these appear to be unusual or obscure.

Differences in comprehension arise not only from the individual respondents (their characteristics and approaches), but also from the text itself.

Differences in comprehension arise not only from the individual respondents (their characteristics and approaches), but also from the text itself. One of our underlying assumptions is that some textual phenomena are harder to understand than others, and, indeed, we found that readers struggled more to make sense of the paradox than the metaphor, as we noted in our analysis. This finding, however, invites further research which could use different (and more) texts to examine whether it is applicable to other literary texts, or confined to our chosen sonnet in particular. Similarly, it would be instructive to draw upon a wider and more diverse set of readers in order to make our findings more secure, and to explore whether different types of readers respond differently to the same textual phenomena.

Clearly, our study has some limitations. The sample size was fairly small, and the sample consisted of a very specific set of individuals: they were university students of English as a foreign language, and, as such, they were more likely to be familiar with, and happy to engage with, literary texts in English than most people. Further research with a more diverse set of readers is therefore desirable. Similarly, our study is based on just one text. While this enabled the respondents to immerse themselves in the text in some depth, it also means that we cannot be certain to what extent our conclusions apply to the same textual phenomena in different texts, and to different types of text including (literary) prose.

However, despite these limitations, we have been able to show how characteristics of the reader and the text may jointly shape comprehension. Both the knowledge of how different types of readers respond to a text and the knowledge of how different textual phenomena may pose challenges to text understanding are essential in designing approaches to teaching literary reading.

Both the knowledge of how different types of readers respond to a text and the knowledge of how different textual phenomena may pose challenges to text understanding are essential in designing approaches to teaching literary reading.

Based on our findings teachers, for example, may want to emphasise the particular linguistic makeup of a literary text and explain to their students how to approach a passage they initially do not understand – and how this differs from the way they approach such a passage in a factual text. One of these differences is that personal associations and experience are less likely to be helpful in understanding a literary text compared to a factual text, as noted above. Teachers, therefore, could stress that it may be tempting to use one's own subjective approach to a passage if it seems incomprehensible, but that without evidence from within the text this is not likely to help comprehension. Instead, students need to learn to pay attention to the meaning of a word or an expression in the context of the text itself, even if it appears to contradict their own experience. At the same time, teachers should be aware of the strategies students employ when approaching texts they find challenging. Anticipating not only obstacles within the text but also readers' reactions is crucial. The ability to differentiate, for example, between a tendency to generalise and an inability to process ambiguity is vital in the teaching of literary texts. Thus, we hope to contribute to the toolkit used by teachers of literary texts.

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7. Appendix I

As well as Shakespeare's Sonnet 43 and the tasks pertaining to its comprehension reproduced in this Appendix, students were presented with a set of questions on their course of studies, previous experience with Shakespeare, reading habits etc. We do not reproduce these background questions here due to space restrictions. They are available on request.

Please read the following poem:

William Shakespeare's Sonnet 43

01 When most I wink, then do mine eyes best see;
 02 For all the day they view things unrespected,
 03 But when I sleep, in dreams they look on thee,
 04 And darkly bright, are bright in dark directed.
 05 Then thou whose shadow shadows doth make bright,
 06 How would thy shadow's form form happy show
 07 To the clear day with thy much clearer light,
 08 When to unseeing eyes thy shade shines so?
 09 How would (I say) mine eyes be blessed made
 10 By looking on thee in the living day,
 11 When in dead night thy fair imperfect shade
 12 Through heavy sleep on sightless eyes doth stay?
 13 All days are nights to see till I see thee,
 14 And nights bright days when dreams do show thee me.

Task 1: line 1 "When most I wink, then do mine eyes best see;"

Item 1.1: What is the relationship between part 1 of the line ("When most I wink") and part 2 ("then do mine eyes best see")?

Item 1.2: Does the line have more meanings than one? yes no

Item 1.3: Give a reason for your answer.

Item 1.4: Does the line make sense to you? yes no

Item 1.5: If it doesn't make sense to you, please say what causes the difficulty. If it does make sense, please explain how you worked it out.

Task 2: lines 5-6 "Then thou whose shadow shadows doth make bright, / How would thy shadow's form form happy show"

Item 2.1 Read line 6 and then decide on the word classes of the phrase "shadow's form form happy show" and mark them accordingly (N / V / Adj...).

Item 2.2: Read line 5 and then decide on the word classes of the phrase "whose shadow shadows" and mark them accordingly (N / V / Adj...).

Item 2.3: Do "shadow" and "shadows" in line 5 have the same meaning? Give reasons for your answer.

Item 2.4: Paraphrase or translate line 5.

Item 2.5: Paraphrase or translate line 6.

Item 2.6: With regard to the form of lines 5-6, what do you find striking?

Task 3: lines 13-14 “All days are nights to see till I see thee, / And nights bright days when dreams do show thee me.”

Item 3.1: Paraphrase or translate lines 13-14.

Item 3.2: Does line 13 make sense to you? yes no

Item 3.3: If it doesn't make sense to you, please say what causes the difficulty. If it does make sense, please explain how you worked it out.

Item 3.4: Going back to line 1: Explain if and how line 1 makes sense in the overall context of the poem.

8. Appendix II

	Code Name	Rationale
Codes determined in advance	Ambiguity +	Ambiguity is a common literary device, which is why spotting it in a literary text is likely to aid comprehension. Accordingly, this code was allocated if students noticed an ambiguity, such as that in lines 1 and 6 (tasks 1, 2.1, 2.5-2.6).
	Ambiguity -	Code was allocated if students <i>did not</i> notice an ambiguity, such as that in lines 1 and 6 (tasks 1, 2.1, 2.5-2.6).
Codes refined during the coding process	Realisation: Context +	Taking account of the context of the whole text can be expected to be relevant for comprehension, hence the a priori decision to employ a code to indicate whether context had been taken into account. During the coding process, it became obvious that the students sometimes state that they realized something, without being aware of the fact that they have actually <i>misunderstood</i> the meaning of the line. We therefore decided to distinguish between understanding and misunderstanding in terms of positive (+) realisations and negative (-) realisations.
	Realisation: Context -	
	Reflection on Context +	Before the coding process, the researchers assumed that the comprehension process requires readers to make constant context updates while reading, as these can help them recognise the functionality, for instance, of a textual phenomenon such as a metaphor within the text (Zirker et al., 2018, p. 160). Being able to reflect on this process is therefore crucial for comprehension, hence the category "Reflection on: Context". Again, it became clear during the coding process that readers were not always aware of their own lack of comprehension, so while they may have reflected on the context, the way in which they did so indicated that they had actually misunderstood the line. Accordingly, the code was divided into appropriate (+) and inappropriate (-) subcategories.
	Reflection on Context -	
Codes derived as part of the	Hypothesis	Readers propose an explanation which may be used as a starting point for further interpretations
	Text analysis	Readers analyze a specific feature of the text.

**inductive
analytic process**

Problem solving	Readers explain how they solved or attempted to solve a problem of understanding.
Generalisation	Readers make overgeneralised statements about something the text says, and, more often, does not say at all.
Personal associations	Readers include free-floating associations with words in the text that have little to do with what the text actually says.
(evaluative) comment on: approach to literary text	Readers comment on their own approach to the comprehension of the text.
(evaluative) comment on: text composition	Readers comment on how the author composed the text.

Estrategias pedagógicas novedosas para motivar a leer a jóvenes con discapacidad intelectual: presentación de una experiencia

Innovative Pedagogical Strategies to Motivate Reading in Young People with Intellectual Disabilities: Presentation of an Experience

Noves estratègies pedagògiques per a motivar a llegir a joves amb discapacitat intel·lectual: presentació d'una experiència

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Resumen

Este artículo describe la experiencia educativa llevada a cabo con un grupo de 16 jóvenes con discapacidad intelectual ligera o moderada en un curso para la mejora de su competencia narrativa durante la pandemia por COVID-19. A partir de la lectura compartida de historias sobre mujeres intrépidas, la lectura individual por ocio, la elaboración de videoreseñas y la creación de nubes de palabras, el alumnado practicó la comprensión de textos narrativos y la elaboración de resúmenes textuales, en pequeño y gran grupo, antes y durante el confinamiento.

El análisis cualitativo del rendimiento y la implicación del alumnado en las actividades propuestas, así como los comentarios del alumnado sobre su satisfacción y aprendizaje muestran la importancia de que las actividades lectoras en las que participa el alumnado con discapacidad intelectual partan de premisas inclusivas y ecológicas. En este contexto, las nuevas tecnologías y las redes sociales pueden emplearse como una estrategia novedosa para motivar a leer a los jóvenes con discapacidad intelectual y fomentar su hábito lector.

Palabras clave: Competencia narrativa; discapacidad intelectual; hábitos lectores; nubes de palabras, confinamiento.

Abstract

This article describes the educational experience carried out with a group of 16 young people with mild to moderate intellectual disabilities in a training course to improve their narrative competence during the COVID-19 pandemic. Based on the shared reading of stories about fearless women, the individual leisure reading, the elaboration of video-reviews and the creation of word-clouds, the students worked in small and large groups on the comprehension of narrative texts and

the elaboration of textual summaries, before and during the confinement. The qualitative analysis of the students' performance and their involvement in the proposed activities, as well as the students' comments on their satisfaction and learning show how important it is for the reading activities in which the students with intellectual disabilities participate to be based on inclusive and ecological premises. In this context, new technologies and social networks can be used as an innovative strategy for encouraging young people with intellectual disabilities to read and promoting their reading habits.

Keywords: Narrative competence; intellectual disability; reading habits; word-clouds; confinement.

Resum

Aquest article descriu l'experiència educativa duta a terme amb un grup de 16 joves amb discapacitat intel·lectual lleugera o moderada en un curs per a millorar la seua competència narrativa durant la pandèmia per la COVID-19. A partir de la lectura compartida d'històries sobre dones intrèpides, la lectura individual per a l'oci, l'elaboració de videoressenyas i la creació de núvols de paraules, l'alumnat va practicar la comprensió de textos narratius i l'elaboració de resums textuais, en grup petit i gran, abans i durant el confinament.

L'anàlisi qualitatiu del rendiment i la implicació de l'alumnat en les activitats proposades, així com els comentaris de l'alumnat sobre la seua satisfacció i aprenentatge, mostren la importància que les activitats lectores en les quals participa l'alumnat amb discapacitat intel·lectual partiquen de premisses inclusives i ecològiques. En aquest context, les noves tecnologies i les xarxes socials es poden utilitzar com a estratègia innovadora per motivar la lectura en els joves amb discapacitat intel·lectual i fomentar el seu hàbit lector.

Paraules clau: Competència narrativa; discapacitat intel·lectual; hàbits lectors; núvols de paraules; confinament.

Extended abstract

Young adults with Intellectual Disabilities (ID) show difficulties in both reading comprehension and written skills, which affect their full inclusion as citizens (Hallahan et al., 2018). These difficulties limit their motivation to engage in reading activities (McGeown et al., 2016), which they find particularly complex and challenging. Over the last decades, educators have been developing new didactic initiatives designed to promote their leisure reading and prevent their usual lack of self-competence in these activities. Examples of these initiatives can be found in reading clubs (Zarcelo, 2015; Pérez and Ávila, 2017) and different activities of reciprocal reading between adolescents with ID and their peers without ID (Hovland, 2020).

On the other hand, new technologies and social networks can be used as an innovative strategy for encouraging young people with intellectual disabilities to read and promoting their reading habits (Delgado et al., 2018; López, 2020). For example, and connecting with the experience we present in this study, we find educational practices that invite young people with reading difficulties to become young *Booktubers*, that is, "reading influencers" who disseminate what they read and promote reading with the help of social networks (Hernández et al., 2018). Another example is found in tasks that propose to students the visualization or creation of "cloud-words" about their readings skills (Huang et al., 2019). Word-clouds are visual representations of texts that make it possible to synthesize their content selecting its key words and displaying them varying their size, colour, typography, and the composition of the macro-image that forms the cloud. This tool can be useful at various moments of reading practice and can be employed with diverse objectives. Thus, before reading, can help students to activate previous knowledge about the topic of the text and

offer an outline of the information that will be found in the text. They can also be used during reading, asking readers, individually or jointly, to select key words from the text that will later form part of the cloud, thus encouraging them to pay attention to important information. Similarly, once the reading activity is over, readers can be asked to select the key words that best represent the text and build a shared word-cloud with their contributions. In this way, we would be encouraging the evocation of their textual situation model.

In this paper we present the experience carried out with young adults with ID to improve their reading literacy based on the “literacy inclusive model” (Flewitt et al., 2009) with special attention to promoting their reading habits and using innovative technological tools such as word-clouds. Participants were 16 young people (7 girls) aged between 18 and 28 years, with a recognized diagnosis of mild or moderate intellectual disability. These young people were taking part in a work training program for young people with ID developed in the University of Valencia (Spain). Concretely, we focus on one of the training courses designed to improve their narrative competence. The course consisted of two blocks of activities. In the first one, participants read narrative stories about fearless women and performed several reading and writing activities (e.g. shared reading; practicing reading skills such as summarizing, clarifying or predicting; elaborate the “Story-hand” graphic organizer; look for information on Internet). In some of these activities, all participants worked collaboratively guided by the teachers, while in others they worked divided into small and heterogeneous groups of four people. The groups were formed by the teachers taking into account the level of reading and communication skills of the members. In the second block, focused on the recording of a reading video-review as *booktubers*, the small groups elaborated the review scripts and were instructed on how to record it. All participants watched and evaluated the video-reviews together and made suggestions for improvement in terms of script, expression, set design, layout, etc.

After teaching the two blocks of the course in classroom, the COVID-19 lockdown took place and it was decided to continue encouraging their reading habits through the activity “I read at home”. To carry it out, it was proposed that each student should choose their own reading and record a video-review summarising it, following the structure of the “Story-hand” graphic organizer (indicating who was the main character of the story; what happened to him/her; when did the story happen; how did it happen and why). Using the virtual classroom of the University of Valencia, each participant shared their reading with their classmates by watching together the video-reviews via videoconference, with a frequency of four videos per week. After watching each video-review, each student filled out a comprehension questionnaire and wrote down five important words about the story explained in the video by their classmates. Based on these key words and using the *WordArt* tool, one of the support teachers created a word-cloud for each of the readings.

The qualitative analysis of the students' performance and their involvement in the proposed activities, as well as the students' comments on their satisfaction and learning show how important it is for the reading activities in which the students with ID participate to be based on inclusive and ecological premises. In this context, new technologies and social networks can be used as an innovative strategy for encouraging young people with intellectual disabilities to read and promoting their reading habits.

1. Introducción

Los jóvenes con Discapacidad Intelectual (DI) muestran dificultades tanto en el desarrollo de habilidades de comprensión lectora como en la producción escrita de textos, que afectan a su plena inclusión como ciudadanos (Hallahan et al., 2018). Estas dificultades limitan su motivación para participar en actividades de lectura (McGeown et al., 2016), que les resultan especialmente complejas y desafiantes. A su vez, un menor contacto con actividades de lectura limita sus oportunidades de estar expuestos a algunos de los beneficios implícitos a la lectura por placer, como las mejoras psicológicas, un mayor bienestar, mejor estado de ánimo y mejoras en el desarrollo de habilidades cognitivas y de pensamiento crítico (Qianqian Wang et al., 2022; Robinson, et al., 2019)

Además, al margen de contextos académicos, uno de los principales factores que contribuye al desarrollo de la comprensión lectora de nuestro alumnado son los hábitos de lectura, es

[...]uno de los principales factores que contribuye al desarrollo de la comprensión lectora de nuestro alumnado son los hábitos de lectura, es decir, la frecuencia con la que leen con fines de ocio

decir, la frecuencia con la que leen con fines de ocio. Los hábitos de lectura se refieren a la exposición general de un individuo a diversos materiales escritos, normalmente fuera del aula. Diversas investigaciones han puesto de manifiesto las ventajas significativas de los hábitos de lectura en la comprensión de textos a diferentes edades y niveles cognitivos (Locher y Pfof, 2019; Mol y Bus, 2011; van Bergen et al., 2022). Es más,

la evidencia apunta consistentemente hacia una relación mutuamente beneficiosa entre los hábitos de lectura y el desarrollo de habilidades de comprensión de textos (Stanovich, 1986). Así, cuando las personas leen por placer, construyen habilidades lingüísticas básicas como vocabulario nuevo y conocimientos previos, que a su vez sirven de base para comprender mejor textos nuevos y más desafiantes y avanzar en el desarrollo de las habilidades de comprensión lectora (Altamura et al., 2023).

Para limitar las barreras de acceso a la lectura entre las personas con dificultades lectoras, en las últimas décadas se han llevado a cabo diversas iniciativas basadas en las premisas de la "lectura fácil". La lectura fácil implica la adaptación lingüística de textos para facilitar su lectura y comprensión y se dirigen, fundamentalmente, a personas con dificultades lectoras (Nomura et al., 2010). Para ello, siguen las directrices de la Federation of Library Association (IFLA) en cuanto al contenido, al lenguaje y a la forma. Como muestra de estas iniciativas encontramos el desarrollo y la promoción de las normas europeas Easy-to-read de la IFLA

(Nomura et al., 2010), investigaciones sobre la eficacia de la lectura fácil para facilitar la comprensión lectora (Belinchón, 2018; Fajardo et al., 2014), la publicación de textos en lectura fácil en ámbitos diversos (p.ej. novelas, información institucional, actividades de ocio) o la creación de los clubs de lectura fácil que promueven sesiones de lectura dialógica entre personas con dificultades lectoras (Salvador y Serra, 2018).

Aunque estas experiencias para incentivar la lectura en jóvenes con DI a través de la lectura fácil han supuesto una aportación de valor incuestionable, consideramos que el acercamiento de estos jóvenes a la lectura tiene que partir de premisas más inclusivas y ecológicas. En este sentido, en primer lugar, acogemos como propio el modelo de *literacy inclusive* (Flewitt et al., 2009) que plantea la lectura como proceso social de significados compartidos a través de símbolos adaptados a las competencias comunicativas de los lectores, reproducidos desde dispositivos diversos. Desde esta perspectiva, todo el mundo, independientemente de su habilidad lectora puede leer por placer y obtener beneficios de ella.

En segundo lugar, consideramos fundamental prestar atención en toda actividad de lectura a los conocidos como procesos lectores cálidos. Así, siguiendo a Sánchez (2010), para aumentar la eficacia de la lectura y la escritura, se han de considerar los procesos cálidos asociados, es decir, los componentes emocionales y actitudinales que junto con los procesos cognitivos emergen en el acto lector. Los procesos lectores cálidos permiten que se valore la actividad de lectura como deseable y viable (o no), mantener el compromiso con los objetivos que guían la actividad, controlar las emociones que amenazan el éxito del proceso y explicarse a uno mismo de un modo adecuado los resultados obtenidos.

En tercer lugar, la “era de Internet” en la que nos encontramos, ha supuesto un cambio importante con respecto a las situaciones de lectura, en las que todo lector y lectora se ve inmerso, que deben considerarse para promover la lectura entre el alumnado con DI. Actualmente, muchas de las situaciones en las que las personas con DI desarrollan sus habilidades de lectoescritura implican el uso y el dominio de nuevas herramientas y habilidades digitales durante el acto de lectura. Estudios previos (Delgado et al., 2019) muestran que los jóvenes con DI disponen de elementos tecnológicos y los usan de forma regular, siendo usuarios habituales de Internet y de redes sociales. Por tanto, tampoco debemos obviar esta realidad a la hora de plantear programas o intervenciones inclusivas y ecológicas dirigidas a estos jóvenes.

Como sabemos, el cierre de los centros educativos durante el año académico 2019-2020 debido a la pandemia por COVID-19 contribuyó a amplificar la presencia y el uso de

herramientas digitales para apoyar las actividades de aprendizaje de los estudiantes (Zhou et al., 2020). El cierre de escuelas tuvo un profundo impacto en el aprendizaje de los estudiantes (Brandenburg et al., 2020), con un efecto especialmente negativo en los estudiantes con DI (Moreno-Rodríguez et al.; 2020). En esta situación, a las dificultades de aprendizaje presentes previamente a la educación a distancia forzada, se sumaron las causadas por la no presencialidad, la imposibilidad de realizar determinadas intervenciones socioeducativas y la utilización de las herramientas digitales como recurso único para el desarrollo de los procesos de enseñanza-aprendizaje.

Con ello, el confinamiento por COVID-19 también tuvo efectos en los hábitos lectores de la ciudadanía de nuestro país. Así, en un estudio realizado con más de cuatro mil españoles por Delgado et al. (2023a), en el que se analizaron sus hábitos lectores en las cuatro categorías de lectura en la etapa adulta más frecuentes (lectura como actividad de ocio, para estudiar o trabajar, para leer noticias y para socializar), estos autores mostraron que los españoles aumentaron su tiempo de lectura durante el confinamiento, que este aumento fue todavía más pronunciado entre las mujeres que entre los hombres, y especialmente cuando el objetivo de lectura era socializar. Además, aunque se produjo un aumento en las cuatro categorías de lectura al principio del confinamiento, este patrón sólo se mantuvo estable en el caso de la lectura de ocio. La lectura para estudiar o trabajar y para socializar disminuyó ligeramente cuatro semanas después, en comparación con las dos primeras semanas, y la lectura de noticias disminuyó aún más, volviendo al nivel de referencia (es decir, antes del confinamiento).

En la misma línea, varios estudios realizados en nuestro país sobre el uso de herramientas digitales en población con DI durante la pandemia por COVID-19 (Bonilla-del-Río y Sánchez, 2022; Delgado et al., 2023b), muestran que el confinamiento supuso un impulso en el uso de situaciones de lectura en Internet por parte de jóvenes con DI, tanto a través de las redes sociales (Bonilla-del-Río y Sánchez, 2022) como mediante el incremento en el uso de mensajería instantánea, correo electrónico, buscar y leer noticias, o el uso de videoconferencias (Delgado et al., , 2023b). Entre las razones que motivaron que aumentase la utilización de estos recursos destacan la falta de comunicación personal debido a la reducción de relaciones presenciales y el uso de aplicaciones digitales en clases online que les acercó al dominio de estas herramientas, promoviendo, a su vez, una disminución del aislamiento social y el miedo a la situación y la necesidad de buscar alternativas de comunicación y entretenimiento (Bonilla-del-Río y Sánchez, 2022). Además, el incremento en

el uso de Internet durante el confinamiento permitió a los jóvenes con DI mejorar la percepción de los beneficios de las herramientas digitales (Delgado et al., 2023b).

2. Intervención para promover la lectura entre los jóvenes con DI

Habitualmente, cuando proponemos a nuestro alumnado actividades didácticas para mejorar sus habilidades lectoras, les pedimos, por ejemplo, que respondan a preguntas sobre los textos para valorar su comprensión, que realicen resúmenes o que escriban sus propias reseñas. Este tipo de actividades supone, para muchos jóvenes con DI, un estresor que en muchos casos puede alejarles del gusto por la narrativa (McGeown et al., 2016). Sin embargo, en las últimas décadas están surgiendo nuevas iniciativas didácticas diseñadas para promover su gusto por la lectura y, con ello, mejorar sus habilidades lectoras, que tratan de evitar que su habitual falta de auto-competencia en estas actividades acabe derivando en un rechazo por la lectura. Ejemplos de estas iniciativas los encontramos en los clubs de lectura (Zarcelo, 2015; Pérez y Ávila, 2017) o las estrategias de instrucción para la comprensión mediante el aprendizaje recíproco entre adolescentes con DI y sus pares sin DI (Hovland, 2020). Por otra parte, son cada vez más frecuentes las experiencias didácticas que tienen el objetivo de mejorar las habilidades lectoras del alumnado con DI mediante el empleo de las nuevas tecnologías (Delgado et al., 2018; López, 2020). Por ejemplo, y conectando con la experiencia que presentamos en este estudio, encontramos prácticas educativas que invitan a los jóvenes con dificultades lectoras a convertirse en jóvenes *Booktubers*, o lo que es lo mismo “influencers lectores”; personas que con la ayuda de las redes sociales divulgan lo que leen y sirven de influencia para ayudar a otros a leer (Hernández et al., 2018).

Otro ejemplo lo encontramos en tareas que proponen al alumnado la visualización o creación de nubes de palabras (*cloud-words*) sobre sus lecturas. Las nubes de palabras son representaciones visuales de los textos que permiten sintetizar su contenido o destacar determinados aspectos del mismo. Así, las aplicaciones digitales que generan nubes de palabras toman las palabras clave o las más frecuentes de una lectura y las muestran representadas por tamaño, en función de su frecuencia de aparición (De Paolo y Wilkinson, 2014). Cuantas más veces aparece una palabra en el texto que se analiza, más grande se representa en la nube. También muestran variaciones en el color, la tipografía y la composición de la macroimagen que forma la nube. Las nubes de palabras están siendo utilizadas tanto en el ámbito creativo (i.e. vídeos, redes sociales), como en el ámbito académico para mejorar las habilidades lectoras (Huang et al., 2019). Además de su aportación como elemento motivador en la actividad lectora, las nubes de palabras pueden

ser útiles en varios momentos de la lectura y pueden ser empleadas con objetivos diversos. Así, antes de la lectura, la imagen que representa la nube junto con las palabras que se destacan pueden ayudar al lector a activar conocimientos previos sobre el tema del texto y ofrecerle un esquema o “vista de pájaro” sobre la información que encontrará en el mismo. También se pueden emplear durante la lectura, pidiendo a los lectores, de forma individual o conjunta, que seleccionen las palabras clave de la lectura que después formarán parte de la nube, fomentando de este modo que presten atención a la información importante. Del mismo modo, una vez finalizada la actividad de lectura, se puede pedir a los lectores que seleccionen las palabras clave que mejor representan el texto y construir con sus aportaciones una nube de palabras conjunta. Con ello, estaríamos fomentando la evocación de su modelo de la situación textual. En definitiva, con esta herramienta se genera un elemento creativo muy atractivo que puede ser utilizado en el aula con fines diversos con potencial para evaluar y contribuir al desarrollo de sus habilidades lectoras. Así, en el ámbito de la evaluación, puede emplearse como herramienta de evaluación parcial de la comprensión, para analizar trabajos, comparar respuestas individuales o analizar la comprensión grupal de un texto. Por otro lado, en el ámbito de la intervención, puede emplearse como herramienta para mejorar la competencia lectora en diferentes momentos, siendo válida para trabajar tanto la microestructura como la macroestructura textual.

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Desde un punto de vista cognitivo, los modelos clásicos sobre comprensión lectora señalan la existencia de dos niveles de comprensión y producción de textos narrativos: la microestructura (o nivel literal) y la macroestructura (o nivel inferencial) (Kintsch, 1998; Stein y Glenn, 1979). La microestructura hace referencia a la complejidad de la narración a nivel de vocabulario y de frase mientras que la macroestructura se refiere a la organización general y la coherencia de la narración. A la hora de establecer los niveles de comprensión de una narración Morgan et al. (2009) señala tres niveles que se corresponden con las cuestiones básicas que debe contener toda narración: Nivel 1, recuerdo (¿quién?, ¿dónde? y ¿cuándo?); Nivel 2, secuenciación (¿qué?) y Nivel 3, justificación (¿cómo? y ¿por qué?). El nivel 1

corresponde a una comprensión literal mientras que los niveles 2 y 3, reflejarían la macroestructura del texto (Kintch; 1998). Como veremos en la experiencia que presentamos a continuación, las nubes de palabras pueden ser una herramienta útil y novedosa para trabajar los tres niveles de comprensión propuestos por Morgan et al (2009).

3. Metodología

3.1. Objetivo

El objetivo de nuestro trabajo es presentar la experiencia llevada a cabo con jóvenes con DI para mejorar su competencia lectora partiendo del modelo de *literacy inclusive*, con especial atención a los procesos cálidos y utilizando herramientas tecnológicas innovadoras como las nubes de palabras.

3.2. Participantes

Los participantes fueron 16 jóvenes (7 chicas) con edades comprendidas entre los 18 y 28 años ($M = 24$; $DT = 3,01$), con diagnóstico reconocido de discapacidad intelectual ligera o moderada, según criterios del DSM-5 (APA, 2013). Estos jóvenes participaban en el Programa de Formación Laboral para Jóvenes con Discapacidad Intelectual UNINCLUV (2ª Edición)¹, de la Universitat de València. UNINCLUV se enmarca en el programa Unidiversidad, impulsado por la Fundación ONCE con el apoyo del Fondo Social Europeo, cuyo objetivo es implicar a las universidades en la formación e inserción laboral de jóvenes con discapacidad intelectual para que puedan convertirse en adultos independientes y contribuir plenamente a la sociedad. Unidiversidad va dirigido a jóvenes con discapacidad intelectual con un grado igual o superior al 33%, reconocida oficialmente; mayores de 18 años con desplazamiento autónomo y habilidades académicas básicas mínimas en lecto-escritura y cálculo; que manifiestan deseo de formarse y con conducta social ajustada para garantizar su inclusión en el entorno universitario.

En el caso concreto de la UNINCLUV (2ª edición), el plan de estudios del programa constaba de 33,7 créditos ECTS organizados en 6 módulos distintos y desarrollados a lo largo de seis meses (noviembre-mayo) en la Facultad de Psicología y Logopedia. La experiencia que aquí

¹ <https://esdeveniments.uv.es/40608/section/21468/uninclud-2o-edicion-programa-de-formacion-para-el-empleo-de-jovenes-con-discapacidad-intelectual.html>

presentamos se ubica en el Módulo 2 del programa: “Formación en comunicación, habilidades sociales, emocionales, entrenamiento cognitivo”, concretamente en la asignatura de carácter obligatorio denominada “lectura dialógica y competencia narrativa”, con una duración de 2.8 créditos ECTS, que fue impartido por dos profesoras del Departamento de Psicología evolutiva y de la educación de la Facultad de Psicología de la Universitat de València.

Cumpliendo con los criterios de Unidiversidad, los participantes presentaban competencias básicas de lectura, con un nivel de comprensión lectora promedio del 46 % (DT = 41,56) de alumnos de cuarto grado (9-10 años de edad), medido con la Escala Magallanes de Lectura y Escritura (EMLE; Toro et al., 2000); una edad de vocabulario receptivo promedio de 10,94 años (DT = 2,6), medido con el test de vocabulario en imágenes PEABODY (Dunn et al., 2010); un nivel promedio del 46 % (DT = 29,5) en competencia lógica del alumnado de tercer grado (8-9 años), medido con la Batería de Aptitudes Diferenciales y Generales (BADYG-E2; Yuste y Yuste, 2011). Además, se obtuvo el consentimiento informado de todos los estudiantes para participar en el estudio y se siguieron los principios de la Declaración de Helsinki.

3.3. Procedimiento

El alumnado realizó de forma presencial la asignatura “Lectura dialógica y competencia narrativa”, que costaba de dos bloques de actividades. En el primero de ellos, los participantes leyeron alguna de las historias del libro *Intrépidas. Los excepcionales viajes de 25 exploradoras* (Pujol y Ortega, 2018) y realizaron actividades variadas con el objetivo de mejorar su competencia narrativa. En algunas de estas actividades trabajaron colaborativamente todos los participantes guiados por las docentes (gran grupo = GG), mientras que en otras lo hicieron divididos en grupos reducidos de cuatro personas (GR). Los grupos, de naturaleza heterogénea, fueron conformados por las docentes teniendo en cuenta el nivel de habilidades lectoras y comunicativas de los integrantes. En el segundo bloque, centrado en la grabación de una reseña a modo de *booktubers*, los grupos reducidos elaboraron los guiones de la reseña y fueron instruidos para su grabación. En la Tabla 1 se resumen los objetivos y actividades que se llevaron a cabo en la asignatura.

	Sesión	Objetivos	Tareas	Grupo
BLOQUE 1: LECTURA DIALÓGICA CON TEXTOS NARRATIVOS	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evaluar el nivel de comprensión lectora y producción de historias de los/as estudiantes. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evaluación comprensión lectora. • Redacción de "Tu viaje soñado". 	GG
	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Iniciarse en la práctica de la lectura dialógica mediante la lectura colectiva de dos textos narrativos. • Realizar enseñanza explícita de estrategias según los principios de enseñanza recíproca (Palincsar y Brown, 1984) (i.e. resumir, hacerse preguntas, predecir y clarificar). • Mejorar la comprensión lectora de los/as participantes. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lectura de dos historias del libro • Realización de fichas de estrategias de lectura de las dos historias. 	GG
	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fomentar los procesos de comunicación entre los/as participantes • Llevar a cabo una enseñanza guiada de las estrategias. • Realizar búsqueda autónoma en internet sobre las intrépidas de las historias • Optimizar la comprensión lectora de los/as participantes. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Realización de organizador gráfico de las dos historias (Story-Hand). 	GG
	4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Construir de forma global el significado de los textos. • Mejorar la producción de historias de los/as estudiantes. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lectura de una de las historias del libro (se asigna la lectura de la historia de una intrépida a cada GR), • Búsqueda de información en Internet sobre la biografía de la intrépida asignada. • Realización del organizador gráfico. • Resumen con la información recopilada de la intrépida asignada. 	GR
	5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Perfeccionar la producción de historias. • Estudiar y memorizar la parte correspondiente del guion. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Realización de guiones para la grabación de una reseña como <i>booktuber</i> sobre su intrépida asignada. 	GR
BLOQUE 2: APRENDER A SER	6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grabar las reseñas por grupos de trabajo. • Aumentar la motivación hacia la lectura, mediante el empleo de las nuevas tecnologías. • Afinar la producción de historias de los/as estudiantes. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Elaborar materiales para el decorado. • Diseñar el vestuario. 	GR

BOOKTUBERS	7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Valorar conjuntamente los vídeos y establecer sugerencias de mejora en cuanto al guion, expresión, decorado, maquetación, etc. • Apreciar el nivel de comprensión lectora y producción de historias de los/as participantes tras la intervención. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Visionado de los vídeos de cada grupo de <i>booktubers</i> • Evaluación comprensión. • Redacción de “Tus vacaciones de Navidad ideales”. 	GR
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Tabla 1. Resumen de la asignatura “lectura dialógica y competencia narrativa”

Tras impartir la asignatura de forma presencial, se produjo el confinamiento por COVID-19 y se decidió continuar fomentando el hábito lector de los jóvenes mediante la actividad: “Yo leo en casa”. Para llevarla a cabo, se propuso que cada joven eligiera su propia lectura para después compartirla con sus compañeros y compañeras. Para facilitar el acceso a lecturas atractivas para el alumnado, se proporcionó un listado de vínculos a libros, tanto en lectura fácil como otros recursos de bibliotecas con acceso libre. Además, se planteó la realización de una tarea autónoma relacionada con lo aprendido durante las sesiones presenciales. Concretamente, se les pidió que, tras la lectura del texto escogido, se grabaran narrando la reseña de su historia, apoyándose en la macroestructura trabajado con el organizador de la Story Hand (Li et al.; 2021), como se muestra en la Tabla 2.


Instrucciones	Material complementario
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grábate en vídeo en tu lugar de lectura favorito. • Explícanos las características del libro, revista o cualquier cosa que estás leyendo o acabas de leer. Para ello, utiliza la técnica de la mano y cuéntanos en el vídeo: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quién es el protagonista de la historia • Qué le ocurre o qué aventuras está viviendo • Cuándo ocurre la historia • Cómo le ocurre o cómo vive su aventura • Dónde ocurre la historia • Por qué ocurre la historia • ¿Te ha gustado la historia? ¿Cuál es tu opinión sobre el libro? • ¿Te ha gustado el diseño? (dibujos, portada, etc.) 	

Tabla 2. Instrucciones de la actividad ‘Yo leo en casa’

Cada semana, cuatro alumnos entregaban su vídeo a través del Aula Virtual de la Universitat de València. Los viernes se visualizaban los vídeos en gran grupo mediante videoconferencia.

Tras la visualización, cada joven rellenaba un cuestionario de comprensión sobre cada uno de los vídeos presentados esa semana por sus compañeros y compañeras. El cuestionario constaba de cinco preguntas de elección múltiple y cinco de respuesta abierta y se recogía información sobre la comprensión siguiendo las cuestiones planteadas para la elaboración del vídeo: Quién es el protagonista de la historia; qué le ocurre o qué aventuras está viviendo; cuándo ocurre la historia; cómo le ocurre o cómo vive su aventura; dónde ocurre la historia y por qué. También, se añadieron preguntas sobre ¿Qué se podría mejorar del vídeo? y ¿recomendarías este libro?

Por último, para poder elaborar una nube de palabras de cada una de las lecturas, se planteó la siguiente pregunta en el cuestionario: *#NubeDePalabras. Escribe 5 palabras importantes sobre la historia que tu compañero o compañera cuenta en el vídeo. A partir de las palabras aportadas por el alumnado y mediante la herramienta WordArt², uno de los docentes de apoyo del módulo, elaboró la nube de palabras de cada una de las lecturas.*

4. Resultados

En las tablas 3, 4, 5 y 6 se muestra para cada texto: la nube de palabras, los porcentajes de acierto en comprensión obtenidos en las preguntas cerradas del cuestionario y ejemplos de palabras clave que aparecen en la nube de palabras para cada uno de los niveles de comprensión que debe contener una narración según Morgan et al. (2009): Nivel 1, recuerdo (¿quién?, ¿dónde? y ¿cuándo?); Nivel 2, secuenciación (¿qué?) y; Nivel 3, justificación (¿cómo? y ¿por qué?). El porcentaje medio de aciertos en las preguntas cerradas de comprensión del cuestionario fue del 88% (mínimo= 75%, máximo= 100%). Las tablas han sido organizadas según el género literario de la lectura elegida por el alumnado.

² <http://wordart.com>

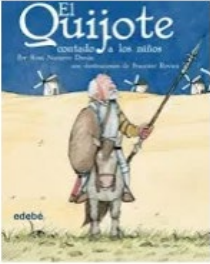


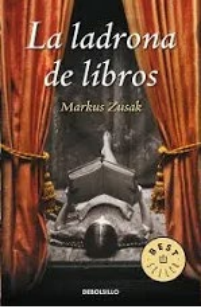

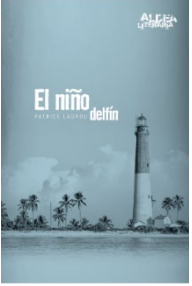

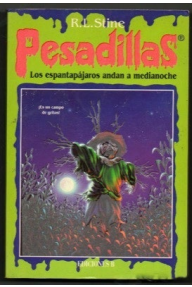







Libro	Nube	% acierto	Niveles de Comprensión
<p><i>EL QUIJOTE</i></p> 		<p>92%</p>	<p><i>Nivel 1:</i></p> <p><i>¿Quién?</i> Don Quijote, Sancho Panza, Dulcinea</p> <p><i>¿Dónde?</i> La Mancha</p> <p><i>¿Cuándo?</i> Junio 1605</p> <hr/> <p><i>Nivel 2: ¿Qué?</i></p> <p>Molinos y gigantes</p> <p>Caballero andante</p> <p>Aventuras</p> <hr/> <p><i>Nivel 3: ¿Cómo? ¿Por qué?</i></p> <p>Enloqueciendo</p>
<p><i>PLATERO Y YO</i></p>		<p>80%</p>	<p><i>Nivel 1:</i></p> <p><i>¿Quién?</i> Burro, Platero</p> <p><i>¿Dónde?</i> Moguer</p> <p><i>¿Cuándo?</i> Invierno, Primavera</p> <hr/> <p><i>Nivel 2: ¿Qué?</i></p> <p>Amistad</p> <p>Enfermedad</p> <p>Sucesos</p> <p>Aventuras</p> <hr/> <p><i>Nivel 3: ¿Cómo? ¿Por qué?</i></p> <p>Miedos</p>

Tabla 3. Literatura Clásica

Libro	Nube		Niveles de Comprensión
<p>LA LADRONA DE LIBROS</p> 		92%	<p>Nivel 1: ¿Quién? Ladrona, Hitler ¿Dónde? Hoguera ¿Cuándo? Guerra</p> <p>Nivel 2: ¿Qué? Libros, fuego, quemar</p> <p>Nivel 3: ¿Cómo? ¿Por qué? Triste</p>
		92%	<p>Nivel 1: ¿Quién? Delfín, niño ¿Dónde? Mar, playa ¿Cuándo? 2017</p> <p>Nivel 2: ¿Qué? Prótesis, nadar</p> <p>Nivel 3: ¿Cómo? ¿Por qué?</p>
<p>PESADILLAS</p> 		100%	<p>Nivel 1: ¿Quién? Abuelo, hermanos ¿Dónde? granja, casa ¿Cuándo? Verano</p> <p>Nivel 2: ¿Qué? Pesadillas</p> <p>Nivel 3: ¿Cómo? ¿Por qué? Miedo, terror, intriga</p>

<p><i>TODO ESTO TE DARÉ</i></p> 		<p>88%</p>	<p><i>Nivel 1:</i> ¿Quién? Manuel, Álvaro, heredero, asesino ¿Dónde? Galicia, ¿Cuándo? Actualidad</p>
<p><i>EL CICLO DEL HOMBRE LOBO</i></p> 		<p>88%</p>	<p><i>Nivel 1:</i> ¿Quién? Hombre, lobo, Marty Coslaw ¿Dónde? Estados Unidos ¿Cuándo? Luna llena, enero, 1984, diciembre</p>
<p><i>WONDERS, LA LECCIÓN DE AUGUST</i></p> 		<p>87%</p>	<p><i>Nivel 1:</i> ¿Quién? Chico, compañeros, padres ¿Dónde? Colegio, Manhattan ¿Cuándo? quinto (curso)</p>


<p><i>EL MUNDO EN UN SEGUNDO</i></p> 		<p>86%</p>	<p><i>Nivel 1:</i> ¿Quién? Chica, mujer mayor, ladrón ¿Dónde? Mundo, casa, ventana, huerto, Portugal ¿Cuándo?:</p> <p><i>Nivel 2: ¿Qué?</i> Tempestad, libro, pelota</p> <p><i>Nivel 3: ¿Cómo? ¿Por qué?</i></p>
<p><i>EL LABERINTO DE LOS ESPÍRITUS</i></p> 		<p>91%</p>	<p><i>Nivel 1:</i> ¿Quién? Alicia Gris, Daniel Sempere, madre, Valls ¿Dónde? Madrid, Barcelona ¿Cuándo? Guerra Civil</p> <p><i>Nivel 2: ¿Qué?</i> Asesinato, muerte</p> <p><i>Nivel 3: ¿Cómo? ¿Por qué?</i></p>
<p><i>LA CHICA INVISIBLE</i></p> 		<p>90%</p>	<p><i>Nivel 1:</i> ¿Quién? Amiga. ¿Dónde? Instituto ¿Cuándo? Mayo</p> <p><i>Nivel 2: ¿Qué?</i> Asesinato, baloncesto, situación</p> <p><i>Nivel 3: ¿Cómo? ¿Por qué?</i> Fortaleza, chungo, cabezona</p>

Tabla 4. Libros de narrativa contemporánea






Cómic	Nube		Niveles de Comprensión
<p><i>LAS JOYAS DE LA CASTAFIORE</i></p> 		<p>80%</p>	<p>Nivel 1: <i>¿Quién?</i> Tintín, Milú, gitanos <i>¿Dónde?</i> Castillo <i>¿Cuándo?</i>: 1963</p> <p>Nivel 2: <i>¿Qué?</i> robo, joyas</p> <p>Nivel 3: <i>¿Cómo?</i> <i>¿Por qué?</i> Misterio</p>

Tabla 5. Cómic

Documento	Nube		Niveles de Comprensión
<p>Información en una revista sobre los vengadores</p> 		<p>91%</p>	<p>Nivel 1: <i>¿Quién?</i> Vengadores <i>¿Dónde?</i> Póster, revista, comic, cine, películas <i>¿Cuándo?</i>: 25 de abril</p> <p>Nivel 2: <i>¿Qué?</i> acción</p> <p>Nivel 3: <i>¿Cómo?</i> <i>¿Por qué?</i></p>
<p>Noticias de actualidad sobre deporte</p>		<p>75%</p>	<p>Nivel 1: <i>¿Quién?</i> Scariolo, Cristiano Ronaldo, Juventus <i>¿Dónde?</i> Juegos olímpicos, Tokio <i>¿Cuándo?</i>: Verano 2019</p>

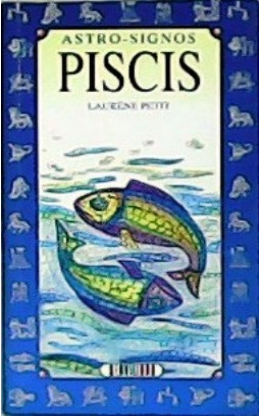



		<p>Nivel 2: ¿Qué? Baloncesto, Deporte, Atletismo</p>
<p>Libro sobre horóscopos</p> 		<p>88%</p> <p>Nivel 1: ¿Quién? Piscis ¿Dónde? ¿Cuándo?:</p> <p>Nivel 2: ¿Qué? amor, amistad, dinero, bonito</p> <p>Nivel 3: ¿Cómo? ¿Por qué? curioso</p>
<p>El método para llegar a ser un gran artista</p> 		<p>85%</p> <p>Nivel 1: ¿Quién? Operación Triunfo ¿Dónde? Academia ¿Cuándo?</p> <p>Nivel 2: ¿Qué? Cantar, amigos, triumfar, bailar</p> <p>Nivel 3: ¿Cómo? ¿Por qué? método</p>

Tabla 6. Otro tipo de documento

Como vemos, nueve jóvenes eligieron la lectura de novelas de narrativa contemporánea, dos eligieron libros clásicos, cuatro personas leyeron otro tipo de textos narrativos como noticias y horóscopos y tan solo una persona eligió leer un cómic. Todo el alumnado eligió leer en formato papel, excepto el alumno que comentó noticias obtenidas de periódicos impresos, noticias de radio, televisión o Internet.

En el Gráfico 1, mostramos el porcentaje de aciertos en comprensión del texto tras la visualización del vídeo, según el género literario. El porcentaje de aciertos es muy alto, mayor

del 80%, en todos los géneros. Especialmente, destaca el alto nivel de comprensión alcanzado en la comprensión de los textos de narrativa contemporánea.

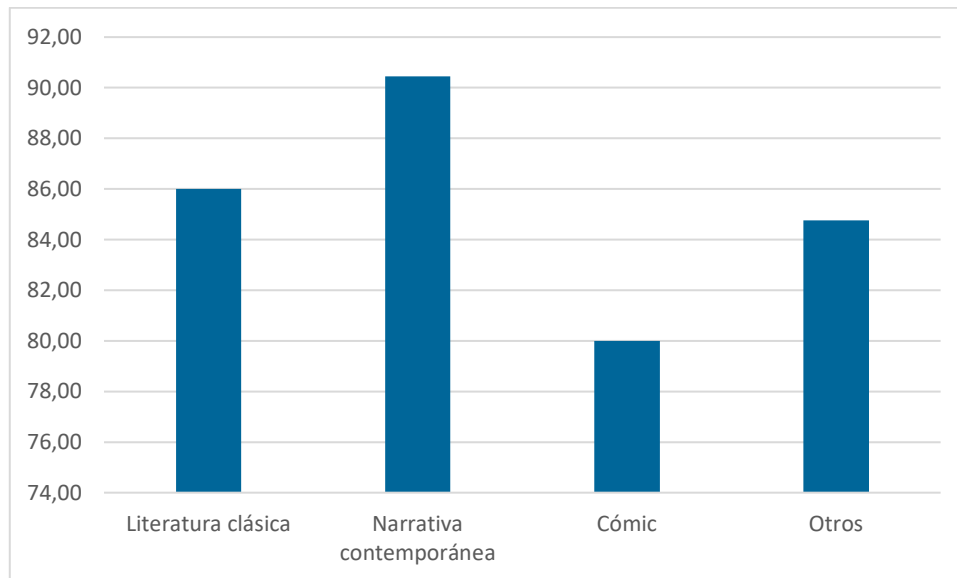


Gráfico 1. Porcentaje de aciertos por género literario de las lecturas elegidas

5. Conclusiones

En este trabajo hemos querido mostrar la experiencia llevada a cabo con jóvenes con DI para fomentar y mejorar sus habilidades lectoras y narrativas, desde una perspectiva de ‘literacy inclusive’, donde todo el alumnado ha podido participar en las actividades propuestas, independientemente de su habilidad lectora. Las actividades del curso presencial dirigidas a conocer la estructura de las narraciones permitieron facilitar la comprensión del texto en los niveles de micro y macroestructura. A modo de ejemplo, los participantes verbalizaban durante el curso la utilidad de las estrategias lectoras (p.ej. resumir, hacerse preguntas) para recordar el texto y comprenderlo mejor. Además, pudimos comprobar como el empleo del organizador gráfico (Story-Hand) les ayudaba a estructurar sus resúmenes y reseñas, incluso cuando no disponían de supervisión por parte de las docentes. Un ejemplo de la importancia de este organizador para el alumnado lo vemos reflejado en la opinión de una joven que en los comentarios de satisfacción señala: “he aprendido a utilizar la mano, para ir comprendiendo lo que leo”.

Atendiendo a los comentarios sobre la satisfacción con el curso de los participantes, quedó reflejado como las actividades de lectura realizada les resultaron motivadoras y gratificantes. Ante la pregunta: “¿te gustaron las actividades realizadas en esta asignatura?”, todos los

estudiantes manifestaron que les gustaron todas o casi todas las actividades. Afirmaron que las actividades que más les gustaron fueron leer, perder el miedo a leer en voz alta y animarse a leer más. Mostraron especial interés por el contenido de los textos del libro *Intrépidas*, tal y como se recoge en uno de los comentarios: “La actividad que más me ha gustado ha sido conocer las historias de las intrépidas, así he podido conocer mundo y sus viajes”

Las biografías incluidas en el texto generaron un debate interesante entre los participantes acerca de cómo las mujeres han avanzado socialmente, en derechos y oportunidades. Además, durante todas las sesiones disfrutaron de poder compartir las lecturas con sus compañeros y trabajar en equipo. Estos aspectos resultaron fundamentales para fomentar los procesos cálidos asociados a la habilidad lectora durante el trascurso de la asignatura (Sánchez, 2010), y fueron destacados en la opinión de los participantes sobre el buen clima creado en clase por las docentes.

En la misma línea, la inclusión del segundo bloque de la asignatura, en la que pudieron ver a famosos *booktubers* y emularlos durante la grabación de los vídeos de las reseñas de sus intrépidas, supuso una motivación adicional para mantener su compromiso con las actividades de lectura. Sabemos por varias investigaciones (Bonilla-del-Río y Sánchez, 2022; Díaz-Garolera et al., 2023) que las nuevas tecnologías y las redes sociales son un elemento motivacional importante para el alumnado con DI. A este respecto se añade el potencial de los *booktubers* para mejorar los hábitos lectores entre los jóvenes (García-Roca, 2021). Así, realizar vídeo-reseñas fue señalado por los participantes como uno de los principales aprendizajes adquiridos en esta asignatura y muy significativo, como queda reflejado en el siguiente comentario: “lo que más me ha gustado ha sido hacer los vídeos de los booktubers porque fue una actividad entretenida, divertida y fantástica”.

Como hemos subrayado anteriormente, la pandemia por COVID-19 supuso un cambio drástico en las situaciones de enseñanza-aprendizaje. El alumnado de UNINCLUV tuvo que adaptarse a cambios que afectaron tanto a la metodología, como a las actividades y los contenidos del curso. En la experiencia concreta que presentamos aquí, los jóvenes tuvieron que elegir sus propias lecturas, realizar las actividades propuestas a distancia y responder los cuestionarios de comprensión de forma autónoma. Centrándonos en las lecturas elegidas, si comparamos nuestros datos con los ofrecidos por el *Informe de Resultados sobre Hábitos de Lectura y Compra de Libros en España de 2021* (Federación de Gremios de Editores de España, 2021), donde se recogen datos de lectura durante la pandemia, comprobamos que el grupo de jóvenes participantes sigue la misma tendencia que la población encuestada, donde se

muestra que los jóvenes lectores entre 14 y 24 años leen libros en mayor porcentaje (85%) que revistas (13.6%) o cómics (23.5%). Este informe también indica que el formato preferido para leer es el de libros en papel, con más de un 70% de preferencia frente a otros tipos de formatos (i.e, audiolibro o e-book). En el caso de los jóvenes de esta experiencia, excepto un caso que eligió leer noticias digitales, todos optaron por leer en papel documentos que tenían a su disposición en el hogar y en ningún caso recurrieron a leer libros en 'lectura fácil'. A pesar de la existencia de publicaciones en este formato y el acceso libre a las mismas, ninguno de nuestros jóvenes se decantó por ellas. No podemos aventurar las causas de este hecho, ni tampoco afirmar que leer en lectura fácil hubiera mejorado la comprensión de nuestros participantes. Sin embargo, consideramos relevante indicar que, en esta experiencia, jóvenes no eligieron textos adaptados para leer por placer. Sin embargo, sí eligieron libros o lecturas que se adecuaban a sus gustos e incluso libros dirigidos a lectores de menor edad, más ajustados a sus habilidades de comprensión.

Con respecto al desarrollo de las actividades durante el confinamiento, destacamos el interés

Sin embargo, consideramos relevante indicar que, en esta experiencia, jóvenes no eligieron textos adaptados para leer por placer. Sin embargo, sí eligieron libros o lecturas que se adecuaban a sus gustos e incluso libros dirigidos a lectores de menor edad, más ajustados a sus habilidades de comprensión.

y nivel de implicación mostrado por todo el alumnado por desarrollar su vídeo-reseña de manera autónoma y mostrarlo a sus compañeros y compañeras. Recordamos al lector que en estos vídeos cada joven resumía su lectura con la instrucción previa de apoyarse en la estructura de la Story-Hand y con el objetivo de compartirla con el resto del alumnado. En las sesiones presenciales los vídeos se elaboraban en grupo reducido, sin embargo, en el confinamiento el vídeo se realizó de forma individual y cada participante lo elaboró sobre su propia lectura. La posibilidad de

realizar la actividad de forma individual fue muy bien valorada por los jóvenes como se señala en el comentario de un participante: "una de las cosas que más me ha gustado ha sido realizar mi propio vídeo".

Además, esta actividad resultó muy satisfactoria ya que les permitía, una vez a la semana, salir de la rutina y soledad que impuso el confinamiento y compartir tiempo y lecturas con otros jóvenes, como se refleja en el siguiente comentario: "me ha gustado estar con los compañeros, poder expresar mi opinión y saber la opinión de los demás al ver los vídeos". Además, conocer libros que leyeron sus compañeros fue gratificante: "me ha gustado conocer otros libros y más cosas a través de los gustos de los compañeros, ver semana a semana los

vídeos publicados”. Vemos en estos comentarios como los componentes emocionales y actitudinales asociados a la lectura, es decir, los procesos cálidos (Sánchez, 2010), jugaron un papel muy importante en esta actividad durante la pandemia. También podemos decir, que desde el modelo de ‘literacy inclusive’ (Flewitt et al., 2009), cualquier joven, independientemente de su nivel lector, accedió a distintas lecturas y les gustó conocerlas.

Tras visionar el vídeo los y las participantes rellenaron un cuestionario de comprensión de la

[...]fueron los vídeos sobre libros de narrativa contemporánea los que obtuvieron mejores niveles de comprensión, aunque el porcentaje de aciertos en todos los tipos de texto fue superior al 80%

reseña de cada lectura. Como se muestra en el Gráfico 1, fueron los vídeos sobre libros de narrativa contemporánea los que obtuvieron mejores niveles de comprensión, aunque el porcentaje de aciertos en todos los tipos de texto fue superior al 80%. Una posible explicación al mayor número de aciertos en las preguntas de comprensión sobre libros de narrativa puede estar en que este tipo de género literario se trabaja mucho durante los años escolares y es, por tanto, una estructura

fácil de transmitir y de reconocer.

Por otro lado, otro aspecto a destacar a partir del análisis de los comentarios a las preguntas abiertas del cuestionario, lo encontramos en las respuestas a la pregunta: “¿qué se podría mejorar del vídeo?”. Así, la respuesta más repetida por el alumnado en alguno de los vídeos presentados fue que el narrador no había seguido el organizador gráfico (Story-Hand) en su vídeo-reseña. Es decir, se observó que la mayoría del alumnado valoraba la utilidad del organizador para elaborar resúmenes de los textos y había aprendido a utilizarlo de manera autónoma, hasta el punto de que reclamaban su uso en las reseñas de los compañeros y compañeras. Finalmente, la última pregunta que se planteaba a los jóvenes fue si recomendarían la lectura que acababan de ver resumida en el vídeo. Aquí las respuestas fueron variadas según sus gustos, pero destacamos un comentario realizado por una joven que nos da una idea del compromiso con la lectura que manifestaron algunos participantes: “yo no lo recomendaría porque a mí no me gustan las historias de miedo, pero los libros siempre enseñan algo y seguro que a alguien le gusta”.

La última tarea realizada en el marco de la asignatura “lectura dialógica y competencia narrativa”, y en la que hemos centrado nuestra aportación, consistió en elaborar nubes de palabras con las cinco palabras que cada participante aportaba como respuesta a la última pregunta del cuestionario: “Escribe 5 palabras importantes sobre la historia que tu compañero

o compañera cuenta en el vídeo”. A este respecto, Cano (2020) hace referencia al potencial de las nubes de palabras para representar el imaginario social, cuando estas se construyen a partir de actividades grupales. En nuestro caso, se trató precisamente de conseguir ese imaginario social sobre cada uno de los textos resumidos utilizando las palabras-clave que los participantes aportaron a partir de la video-reseña de su compañero o compañera. En el análisis de las nubes de palabras elaboradas durante esta experiencia particular, hemos podido comprobar cómo estas se mostraron capaces de recoger las ideas principales de los textos, reflejando aspectos cruciales tanto de la micro como de la macroestructura textual. Ahondando en esta cuestión, si realizamos un análisis cualitativo sobre la comprensión del vídeo a partir de las nubes de palabras, basado en Morgan et al. (2009), encontramos que las palabras clave que tienen mayor frecuencia y que se reflejan en la nube de palabras se sitúan en el nivel 1, de recuerdo (¿quién?, ¿dónde? o ¿cuándo?), aunque también encontramos muchas palabras en el nivel 2, de secuenciación, (¿qué?) y detectamos pocas palabras que alcancen el nivel 3 de justificación (¿cómo? y ¿por qué?). En las tablas 3, 4 y 5 se puede comprobar este aspecto con mayor detalle. Por tanto, podemos concluir que los participantes mostraron mayor comprensión literal que inferencial de los textos, tal como ocurre habitualmente cuando se analiza la comprensión lectora de jóvenes con DI (Fajardo et al., 2014; Pérez y Ávila, 2017).

Por tanto, podemos concluir que los participantes mostraron mayor comprensión literal que inferencial de los textos, tal como ocurre habitualmente cuando se analiza la comprensión lectora de jóvenes con DI

Atendiendo a los comentarios sobre la satisfacción con la actividad de nubes de palabras, quedó reflejada su buena acogida entre el alumnado en comentarios como: “me ha gustado mucho ver las nubes de palabras”. Por ello, por petición del alumnado, el docente de apoyo impartió un taller on-line para enseñar al alumnado a elaborar sus propias nubes de palabras con la herramienta *Word-Art*. Durante el taller, Los participantes crearon sus propias nubes sobre temas de su agrado e indicaron que les gustó mucho esa actividad y así lo reflejaron en sus comentarios: “me ha gustado mucho aprender a realizar las nubes de palabras, ya que es útil para otras cosas y son fáciles de hacer”.

Para concluir esta aportación, nos ha parecido oportuno destacar algunos de los aspectos que consideramos especialmente positivos de la realización de esta experiencia, así como señalar algunas de sus limitaciones. En primer lugar, consideramos la experiencia cuenta con potencial para enmarcarse dentro del modelo ‘literacy inclusive’ (Flewitt et al., 2009). Así, conseguimos involucrar a los jóvenes con DI en actividades lectoras, consiguiendo implicar a

todo el alumnado en las actividades propuestas, independientemente de su habilidad lectora. Además, los participantes leyeron en su tiempo libre durante el confinamiento, mantuvieron compromiso con los objetivos de las actividades, incluso cuando estas tenían que realizarse de forma individual y autónoma. Más aún, algunos manifestaron que la experiencia los animó a leer más. En segundo lugar, hemos comprobado que prestar atención a los procesos cálidos (Sánchez; 2010), a través de acciones como dejar elegir la lectura, participar en grupo on-line o realizar su propio vídeo-reseña, contribuyó a que los jóvenes mantuvieran ese compromiso y se mostraran con autocompetencia para abordar las tareas de lectura propuestas. Por último, el uso de nuevas herramientas digitales como la elaboración de video-reseñas o la elaboración de nubes de palabras creemos que fue un elemento crucial para mantener motivado al alumnado. Pensamos que ambas actividades pueden ser un recurso útil para trabajar las habilidades lectoras desde múltiples perspectivas. Por citar algún ejemplo, las nubes de palabras pueden emplearse para realizar una evaluación cualitativa de la comprensión grupal, para activar conocimientos previos, para mantener la atención y destacar la información durante la lectura o para contribuir a formar un modelo de la situación coherente tras la lectura.

Finalmente, consideramos una limitación del trabajo aquí presentado no haber analizado el contenido de los vídeos presentados. Sin embargo, el alto grado de aciertos en las preguntas del cuestionario junto con la frecuencia de las palabras clave elegidas por los jóvenes, nos hacen pensar en una buena comprensión del mensaje trasladado en los vídeos. Otra limitación a destacar es que desconocemos el nivel de apoyo con el que contaron los participantes en sus hogares para la elaboración de la video-reseña.

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“The students expect to read non-fiction, so that’s what they’re set on”. Tensions between students’ and teachers’ views on reading, including educational perspectives

“Los estudiantes esperan leer no ficción, eso es lo que tienen en mente”. Tensiones entre las perspectivas de los estudiantes y los profesores sobre la lectura, incluyendo perspectivas educativas

“Els estudiants esperen llegir no ficció, de manera que això és el que tenen en ment”. Tensions entre les visions dels estudiants i dels professors sobre la lectura, incloent perspectives educatives

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Abstract

This article aims to investigate how students' responses to reading and talking about a fictional novel relate to teachers' ideas about the possibilities of a literary work. A large group (413) of readers aged 10–12 completed questionnaires both before and after reading the Romani author Katarina Taikon's *Katitzi* (1969/2015), which, in a fast-paced and engaging way touches upon subjects such as vulnerability and racism. Responses from 14 teachers are analysed in relation to these students' answers. The results show great student engagement, with a clear majority (76%) formulating thoughts about Katitzi's situation and their contemporaries. The teachers, on the other hand, highlight problems they see with the literary work and tend to value reading non-fiction more. Through the discrepancy, the question arises as to whether the students' engagement after reading could be utilised more, so that they develop both as readers and participants in a current social debate.

Keywords: teaching literature, children's and youth literature, book talks, Swedish in primary school

Resumen

Este artículo tiene como objetivo investigar cómo las respuestas de los y las estudiantes al leer y hablar sobre una novela de ficción se relacionan con las ideas de los profesores sobre las posibilidades de una obra literaria. Un gran grupo (413) de lectores de 10 a 12 años completó cuestionarios antes y después de leer Katitzi (1969/2015), de la autora romaní Katarina Taikon, que, de manera rápida y atractiva, aborda temas como la vulnerabilidad y el racismo. Se analizan las respuestas de 14 miembros del profesorado en relación con las respuestas del alumnado. Los resultados muestran un gran compromiso por parte de los y las estudiantes, con una clara mayoría (76%) expresando pensamientos sobre la situación de Katitzi y sus contemporáneos. Por otro lado, el profesorado resalta problemas que percibe en la obra literaria y tiende a valorar más la lectura de no ficción. A través de esta discrepancia, surge la pregunta de si la motivación del alumnado después de la lectura podría ser utilizado de manera más efectiva, para que se desarrollen tanto como lectores como participantes en un debate social actual.

Palabras clave: enseñanza de literatura, literatura infantil y juvenil, charlas sobre libros, sueco en la escuela primaria.

Resum

Aquest article té com a objectiu investigar com les respostes de l'estudiantat en llegir i parlar sobre una novel·la de ficció es relacionen amb les idees del professorat sobre les possibilitats d'una obra literària. Un grup ampli (413) de lectors de 10 a 12 anys va completar qüestionaris abans i després de llegir Katitzi (1969/2015), de l'autora romaní Katarina Taikon, que, d'una manera ràpida i atractiva, aborda temes com la vulnerabilitat i el racisme. Les respostes de 14 membres del professorat s'analitzen en relació amb les respostes d'aquests i aquestes estudiants. Els resultats mostren un gran compromís de l'alumnat, amb una clara majoria (76%) formulant pensaments sobre la situació de Katitzi i els seus contemporanis. El professorat, d'altra banda, destaca problemes que veu en l'obra literària i tendeix a valorar més la lectura de no ficció. A través de la discrepància, sorgeix la pregunta de si la implicació dels i les estudiants després de la lectura podria ser utilitzada més, de manera que es desenvolupen tant com a lectors com a participants en un debat social actual.

Paraules clau: ensenyament de literatura, literatura infantil i juvenil, xerrades de llibres, suec a l'escola primària.

1. Introduction

Ideas and theories about the thought and mind developing potential of literary, fictional, text have had a major influence on research in the field of teaching literature, at least since the 1930s – and continue to do so (Langer, 2017; Martinsson, 2018; Rosenblatt, 2002). On the other hand, the question of what place literature actually has in Swedish schools in general, and within the subject of Swedish in particular, described often as utility- and measurability oriented, has been raised repeatedly during the last ten years (Erixon & Löfgren, 2018; Lindell, 2020; Lundström,

Manderstedt & Palo, 2011; Sigvardsson, 2020). Adding the digital media surge, the question if literary fiction in the 2020s can mean anything at all for young people’s mental identity and personal development is relevant. Although this matter is regularly discussed, both within and outside the research sphere of teaching literature, it is very rarely based on larger, empirical data of literature-reading students and their teachers (Miall, 2006; Nordberg, 2017; Pettersson, 2015). In this article, receptions, reactions and reading experiences of over 400 *Katitzi*-readers aged 9–12, taking part in a municipal community reading circle as part of the research project *Everybody reads! (Alla läser!)* – and their teachers' reflections on the novel during the project – will form the basis for a grounded discussion about the potential of fiction and what the results possibly mean for literature teaching.

This article looks into how students' responses, during and after reading and discussing a novel, relate to teachers' ideas about the importance of literary fiction. Thereby, we want to make visible educational possibilities that lie within values-based work that is not tied to pre-stipulated goals. For this purpose, a book, namely Katarina Taikon's *Katitzi* (1969/2015), with relevance to the school's value base/ethical work is used. The overall analysis, including answers from students and teachers, thus forms the basis for a more comprehensive discussion.

The research questions are linked to these two perspectives, making a mixed-method design of

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the study necessary. Since questions 1 and 2 focus on students’ reactions to the novel, grounded theory is needed to grasp the complexity and diversity of the data, while question 3, focusing on a limited number of teachers’ views on the work with *Katitzi*, asks for qualitative research and analysis of the non-numerical data of the study. The research questions read:

- 1) What thoughts and reactions develop in the participating students during the joint reading and conversation about a fiction book that touches on difficult topics such as racism and exclusion? What role does the basic assumption that the story is a literary text, instead of non-fiction, play in student learning?
- 2) In what ways do the students relate the events in the novel, reflecting the social and historical background of Romani people in Sweden, to their own lives and the world around them?
- 3) How do the teachers view and reflect on the need to discuss ethnic belonging and exclusion through *Katitzi* with their students? In what ways do they express opinions about their students’

reading of literary texts, in relation to other forms of texts? Do they have anything to say about the social relevance of fiction, and the relationship of fictional stories to the outside world?

In the spring term of 2021, 413 middle school students in a municipality in central Sweden read and discussed the novel *Katitzi* (1968/2015), as part of an extensive and ongoing reading project named, as mentioned above, *Everybody Reads!* The research project's overarching goal is to study the potential and possibilities of deepening conversations about the conditions of democracy, and citizens' different opportunities to participate in social development, through reading and discussing literature in a book circle. The project was developed in 2019, in close collaboration with the municipality, wherein all students from years 4 to 12 in municipal schools read the same novel during a four-week period. The municipality's intention was to promote literary reading and stimulate students' thinking and challenge established patterns and norm systems. The municipality, is slightly below the national average, in terms of the percentage of people with higher education (SCB, 2020; Swedish School Administration, 2022b). School results are also below the national average in some aspects (National Agency for Education, 2022a). Within empirical reading research, the majority of the students who participated in the project can be described as "ordinary readers" (Miall, 2006, 2.)

The idea lying at the heart of the project has been to keep the fictional story itself and the joint discussion at the very centre of classroom work (cf. Lindell & Öhman; Lyngfelt & Nissen, 2018; 2019; Nordberg 2020). We assessed that the best way to do so was to let each teacher design and decide how this should take place in interaction with their students, with the clear basic requirement that the reading and discussion of the book must occur in a group. This basic requirement has been communicated to the teachers via emails sent by the municipality's coordinator (See Nordberg 2021; 2022a; 2022b).

2. Background and theoretical considerations

The project *Everybody Reads* aims to put established reader response and literary educational theories about literature reading and its potential for personal development, increased understanding of other people and a broad perspective on the world (Felski, 2008; Langer, 2017; Nussbaum, 2010; Rosenblatt 2002; Ziehe, 2003; Zunshine 2006) in direct relation to large-scale empirical results from actual readers' receptions and reading experiences (cf. Bortolussi & Dixon, 2003; Pettersson, 2015; Nordberg, 2019). This theoretical point of departure is rooted in Grounded Theory (Charmaz, 2008; Glaser & Strauss, 2008; Glaser, 2010), meaning that Grounded Theory is used flexibly to conduct research that prioritizes exploration of a given phenomenon – here students' perception of a novel – in a predominantly inductive theory

development paradigm (cf. Birks et al., 2017). However, as pointed out before, an approach of qualitative research is also needed, to be able to discuss the teachers’ opinions about their students’ responses. Before looking into how we implemented GT in this study, the theoretical position needs further contextualizing in the Swedish school system, in curricular developments within the subject of Swedish and in notable tendencies in literature teaching.

Scholars have frequently highlighted the beneficial effects of reading literature (Miller, 2002; Attridge, 2004; Farrell, 2004; Felski, 2008; cf. Sumara, 2002), for instance, for an understanding of how other people think and feel (“Theory of Mind”, Zunshine, 2006). In this they have received authoritative support from such authorities as the philosopher Martha Nussbaum (1990, 1998, 2008, 2010) and the historian of ideas Sverker Sörlin (2019) who emphasized the role of literature and the humanities in social cohesion and the promotion of democratic ideals (Biesta, 2013). Yet, all of this reflects theoretical discourse rather than empirical research. There has, however, been some empirical corroboration (e.g., Comer Kidd & Castano 2013) and, in the last decade, research into the digital environment which strongly influences reading.

Furthermore, international critical literacy studies have highlighted the ways teachers and students use language and other semiotic resources to shape their understanding of issues such as gender and social inequality (Janks, 2009). Additionally, studies have stressed the importance of classroom practices in furthering intersectionally and promote critical thinking as a competence developed by reading fiction (Janks, 2013, 2014). In similar studies in Sweden the democratic potential – and responsibility – within Swedish as a school subject has been debated since the late seventies. The first and very influential initiatives, notably those of the “Pedagogical Group”, were reader orientated, aiming at a literary reading where the pupils’ responses to texts were connected with their own life experience (Lindberg, 1981; L-G Malmgren & Thavenius, 1981; Malmgren & Thavenius, 1982; Linnér & Malmgren, 1982; Linnér, 1984; Malmgren, 1984; Malmgren, 1986). These efforts also emphasized the importance of a broad societal perspective beyond personal readings (Malmgren, 1984, 181). All this was based on the premise that personal engagement in reading makes classrooms more dialogical and egalitarian as well as forms critical and democratic citizens. During the late nineties these ideas receded in favour of a more competence-oriented perspective, which dominated the following decade (Brink, 2006; Degerman, 2012; Mossberg Schüllerkvist, 2008; Torell, 2002; Ullström, 2009; Wolf, 2002; Årheim, 2007). In 2003, however, the democratic orientation was highlighted again, including the point that pupils’ access to a literary reading culture is a profound democratic right (Bergöö & Ewald, 2003; Liberg, 2003; G. Malmgren, 2003; Molloy, 2003). This idea of Swedish as a subject that fosters democratic values has been criticized as

instrumentalisation (Andersson, 2010; Lyngfelt, 2017; Thavenius, 2005) but it has frequently been revived as a way of promoting democratic values (“värdegrundsarbete”) (Alkestrand, 2016; Lilja Waltå, 2016; Molloy, 2007, 2017).

In practice, literature in the Swedish school system has been clearly marginalized, and the literary teaching instrumentalised, since the new curriculum was launched in 2011, as is shown by Öhman (2015), Lyngfelt (2017), Andersson (2019), Lindell (2019), Nordberg (2020) and Sigvardsson (2020). In policy documents, there has been an emphasis on types of texts other than literature (‘descriptive’, ‘explanatory’, ‘instructive’), as well as increased general requirements of measurability and grading criteria (“kunskapskrav”) (see Berg, 2010; Bornemark, 2018; Lundström, Manderstedt & Palo, 2011; Molloy, 2011; Nordberg, 2021). This favours the study of text genres, linguistically, restricting itself to basic text comprehension in line with functional literacy (Borsgård & Jönsson, 2019, Erixon & Löfgren, 2018). Thus, at a time when antidemocratic forces have grown stronger, changes made in curricula have pushed aside aesthetic forms of expression across all school levels (Lyngfelt & Nissen, 2018). This includes the observation that far from all students are offered the opportunity to engage in dialogue about fictional texts, especially not students in multilingual schools and in socioeconomically vulnerable areas (Economou, 2018). This is worth stressing, since aesthetic expression has been seen as a starting point for students to reconsider their views through encountering what is not already known to them (Ziehe, 2003).

Worth noticing, and considering theoretically, is that all students come from a small Swedish municipality where their parents’ academic education is below the national average. In the analyses, their meaning-production is viewed in terms of reader-response theory as a collaboration between them and the text (cf., e.g., Langer 2017: Rosenblatt, 2002; Torell 2002). Our position is that responses thus need to be related to their possibilities of assuming a role as a reader or as a respondent answering the questionnaire or participating in a book talk or a focus group.

However, students' development through reading literature is dependent on teachers' perceptions of their students and their needs, as well as their own thoughts about what fiction can offer and potentially mean to students. In the article, research on teachers' beliefs is therefore another theoretical starting point. Studies in this field have shown that teachers' experiences and beliefs shape teaching and thus have an impact on students' learning and development (Fives & Buehl, 2012; Kalaja et al., 2016). Dressel (2005) points out, it is often assumed that reading and responding to multicultural literature will help dominant-culture

readers value minorities and diversity. The students’ response to this effort, according to Dressel, could be conceived as complex: although students are able to empathize with characters in the story world, their understanding seldom transfers to cultural understanding in the real world. In her study, about middle-school students, the students tend to reject the literary texts or reshape it, resulting in inconsistencies and illogical conclusions. What Dressel stresses, which is crucial for the present study, is the role of teachers as co-learners and leaders of negotiations about the meaning of difference, taking into account that some voices are more dominant than others in the classroom. In this context, Bruner's (2002) theorising about narratives is also relevant; according to him, we are stories and become what we talk about. The overarching educational question for the article then becomes which "stories" could be possible to form based on the reading of *Katitzi*, considering both the students' responses to the book and the teachers' ideas about their students and how to work with fiction in the classroom.

3. Method and data collection

Grounded Theory (Glaser & Strauss 1967/2008) tempers researchers’ preconceptions in a systematic interaction between data and analysis; data based on a tentative initial orientation generates principles for eliciting new data as well as categorizing responses and making them quantitatively measurable. This comprises a constructivist conception of the categorization as socially positioned with regard to views (in this study) of multiculturalism and diversity, meaning that the researchers must factor into the analysis their own acculturated positions as observers (Charmaz, 2008). This is made by the researchers, by being wary of selective analyses telling a single narrative and an awareness of the social position of the respondents mentioned above. To be able to discuss values and opinions, qualitative research is also added to the study. As pointed out before, it is used for the non-numerical data of the study, i.e., the 14 teachers’ comments on their students’ reading of *Katitzi*.

Further, Grounded Theory means the possibility of using an approach that is as open as possible to the collection of empirical data, without, for example, pre-formulated thoughts about the ideal reader and the text's given interpretation possibilities (cf. Bortolussi & Dixon, 2003; Nordberg, 2017; Pettersson, 2016). Digital questionnaires, filled in by the participating students and teachers before and after each reading period, have, in the project as a whole, been used to investigate reading and media habits in general, attitudes towards reading fiction in particular, and, most importantly, the students' reflections on the books in question. The students have also been asked about their perceptions of shared reading and organised book talks. Furthermore, direct questions have been posed concerning the students' view of possible

connections between the fictional world and reality. Students have also been asked questions about if and how they consider the potential to develop thoughts about their own existence based on their reading experiences and reflections, a key idea highlighted repeatedly within reader response theory and the literary educational fields overall (Langer, 2017; Nussbaum, 2010; Rosenblatt, 2002).

Taikon's novel *Katitzi* (1968/2015) was chosen since it is easy for students about the same age as “Katitzi” to connect to, and also because the book mirrors the complexity of being part of a minority in Sweden (the Romanis), from a child’s perspective. This book is the first in a series of thirteen books, and was published in a new edition in 2015. In the novel, we follow Katitzi’s, the Romani girl’s, reunion with her family and their wandering life, running a mobile “Tivoli”¹, after she had been living for some time in an orphanage – and before that with the “Cirkus people” (her early childhood is somewhat shrouded in obscurity.) The events are depicted in a direct, innocent and captivating way, addressing the very tangible racism that Romani people experienced in Sweden in the late thirties (Hallberg, 2017). At the same time, the story holds excitement, action, humour and warmth. Taikon, having a Romani background herself, has been an activist, parallel to her authorship for decades. The *Katitzi* books are fictional novels but have often been approached as autobiographical material (Widhe, 2021).

The results presented are based on digital questionnaires, which in turn are related to the research questions. For the students, the questionnaires analysed here were, with one exception, completed *after* the reading of the novel, while the teachers’ responses include both their opinions before and after the students’ reading of the book. The before-questionnaires contained 15 questions for students, and 24 for their teachers. As a whole, the questionnaires aimed at exploring the students’ use of media and their reading habits, their attitudes to literature, and their views on democracy, gender and ethnicity. Additionally, they included questions about the novel and (when it comes to the teachers) the teachers’ views on their students’ response to the book. This empirical data was collected by statements that the teachers were asked to respond to by individual comments, written by themselves; it is the teachers’ written-down comments that the result about their responses is based on. The after-questionnaires for the students were complemented by semi-structured focus group interviews based on the precepts of Krueger (2009), Morgan (1997), and Wibeck (2010).² All in all, this means that it is the results of 413 student digital surveys and the response of 14 teachers that

¹ A Tivoli is an amusement park.

² These interviews are not analysed in this article, but they give the researchers a broadened perspective.

is presented in the article. For the most part, the analyses of student responses are based on closely reading free text responses. In these free text questions there is an openness that interacts with the GT-approach of the study. To give an overview, other forms of student responses, where they grade and choose among alternatives, are also reported quantitatively, where different response categories have been compiled and calculated as a percentage outcome. These response categories emerged entirely from participant responses, not from the pre-determined focus areas. Since the teachers’ responses are relatively few in number, but still important for the purpose of the study, the variation in the teachers’ responses is not reported as a percentage. Instead, attention is paid (to a greater degree than when reporting the students’ response) to the teachers’ comments. Based on the results, a literary, educational discussion follows in the conclusion.ⁱ All questions and answers are translated from Swedish.

[...]different response categories have been compiled and calculated as a percentage outcome. These response categories emerged entirely from participant responses, not from the pre-determined focus areas

4. Results

As in all studies, there are limitations to the study presented, including the fact that the results of the questionnaires, handed out before and after the study, may be due to sociocultural factors like the students’ self-confidence and the classroom climate (socially), when answering the questionnaires. Nevertheless, we can state that this large-scale survey is being conducted in a broad base of ordinary, non-academic readers. We opine that this in itself has a certain relevance, through the empirical grounding, within the complex field of literary reading and teaching.

Results are presented in this section, following the chronology of the research questions. The first two research questions are addressed together, not separately. The results section focuses on certain survey questions where the processes we examine appear in different ways; specifically, four questions out of 23 in the student questionnaire. Consistent with the student responses reported in the form of quotations is that they are representative of the category they belong to in terms of content, expressed thoughts and way of reasoning. Regarding the teachers’ answers, three questions out of 25 are analysed in relation to research question 3 with sub-questions.

4.1. Students’ thoughts and feelings after reading

The first question which students answered after finishing the novel is formulated openly as: *What thoughts and feelings did you get from the book that you read with the class?* With this

openness, the answers provide a clear and direct indication of which impressions were strongest among the readers, and how their thoughts and feelings were set in motion. The students' answers have been categorised based on what is mainly addressed and discussed in them. What the categories contain and how they differ can be seen in table 1. In cases where the students clearly process more than one category in their answers, both answers are included in the compilation. This means that the total number of answers numerically becomes greater than 413 (429), and the combined percentage is greater than 100 (104%). However, the numerical results in the categories are consistently converted into percentages in relation to the total number of students participating in the study; thus, in that aspect, the comparison will be consistent, both within this question and in relation to compilations of the other questions. The diagram shows the outcome of the response categories to the open-ended, initial question in percentage form:

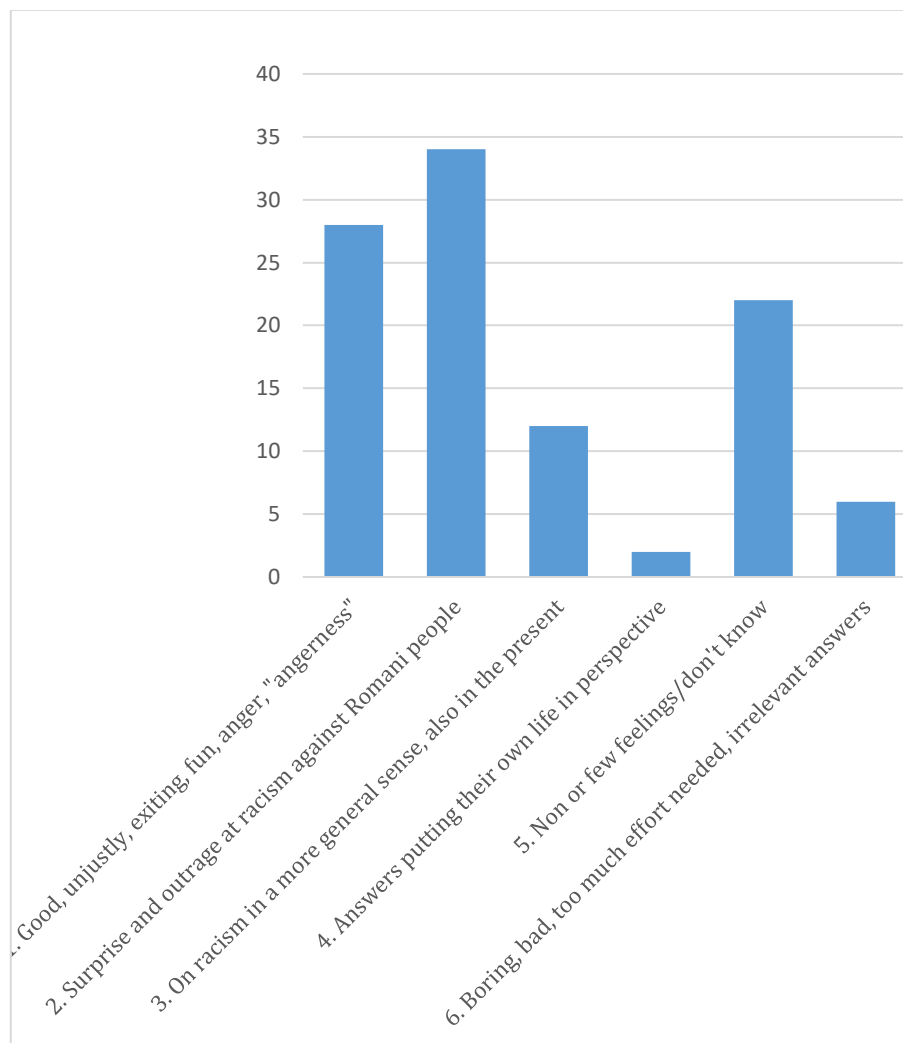


Figure 1. What thoughts and feelings did you get from the book that you read with the class?
N=413. Outcome in per cent.

The largest group, category 2 with 34% of the total, represents students who express a clear commitment to the novel, and to the situation of the Romani people. The story of Katitzi has clearly evoked strong reactions, such as anger, sadness and fear. However, many of them have also mentioned that humour in the book was an essential part of their reading experience. Reflections and reactions on how Romani people, and children in a more general sense, have been treated throughout history are common and are representative of the category. Some typical examples are cited here:

S1: I get upset about how children were treated at that time, and about the prejudices people had about the Romani people.

S2: I think the book is very funny, but still a little uncomfortable when others treat Romani people in a bad way.

S3: I've gotten angry at how people have prejudices about certain people, and I've also gotten happy on some occasions and a little bit of everything.³

The story of Katitzi has clearly evoked strong reactions, such as anger, sadness and fear. However, many of them have also mentioned that humour in the book was an essential part of their reading experience.

The second most common response type, category 1, involves a large group of students (28%), who, in a somewhat more unspecified way, reflect on how the novel made them feel. The answer type is closely related to the previous one as the students express that they found the reading fun, rewarding, exciting, but also that it aroused anger with the injustices portrayed. Here are some representative examples:

S4: A little, anger – angerness?⁴ is it a feeling? It has made me angry.

S5: Sad but, at the same time, instructive and funny.

S6: It was unfair, but it was a good and exciting book.

S7: I have felt: angry (injustice), I think Katitzi is funny.....😊

Together, these two categories make up for 62% of the total response outcome. In a third group of answers, category 3, which is related to the two previous ones, answers testify to commitment and strong reactions – but where the students also lead the discussion further on, to a more general level. Here, there are descriptions of contexts and connections to racism and

³ Students are referred to as Student 1, Student 2 and so forth, shortened as S1, S2 etc. All responses have been translated by the authors.

⁴ In Swedish: “arghet” – which is a non-idiomatic expression.

human rights occurring currently. This is an important difference, illustrating the students' ability to step back from the text and reflect on reality in relation to fiction (Langer, 2017). In total, 12% of the students expressed themselves as such in their answers to the open-ended initial question:

S8: I think the book is very good. I really come to think about how unpleasant and sometimes mean some people are just because you are a certain person. It's terrible.

S9: I get very happy, angry, sad- quite a lot of emotions at the same time. And I get a lot of thoughts about racism that it is wrong for people to put down people who may have a different skin colour or such.

S10: It teaches us about what it's like not to be "normal".

S11: 🌍 🌍

A further distinction can be made regarding those answers that clearly and explicitly relate what they have read, and the injustices and abuses depicted, to their own life, when asked the open-ended question. Such answers form category 4. Only 2% of the responses were in that direction:

S12: I think about how others are doing and that I'm actually doing great.

S13: That not everyone has it like me and that there are some who have it worse e.g. If I don't get an ice cream on a Monday, there are others who don't even get food.

Furthermore, answers from students who responded that they had no feelings at all, or briefly wrote "no", or "at least not many", "don't know" and such are very brief. Together, the response type forms category 5 and constitutes 22%. There are some slightly longer arguments, with at least one complete sentence, but they are occasional. The same applies to the 6% in category 6, who wrote that they experienced the reading as boring, difficult or answered with just one word or sign that does not belong to the question.

In total, the answer categories (1, 2, 3, 4), where the students expressed their engagement in the book, reaches 76%, representing a considerable majority. It is worth noting that the vast majority, in response to the open-ended question placed first in the questionnaire, also developed their thoughts on injustice and human rights. Overall, this is clearly the dominant response type, which indicates that the reading and the book talks may have functioned as a kind of a common platform from which the students formulate and share their reasoning about ethnicity and diversity in society.

4.2. Students’ reflections on the book’s meaning/message

The next question in the survey highlights the student’s thoughts on the meaning or the message of the book. The categorised answers resulted in the table below:

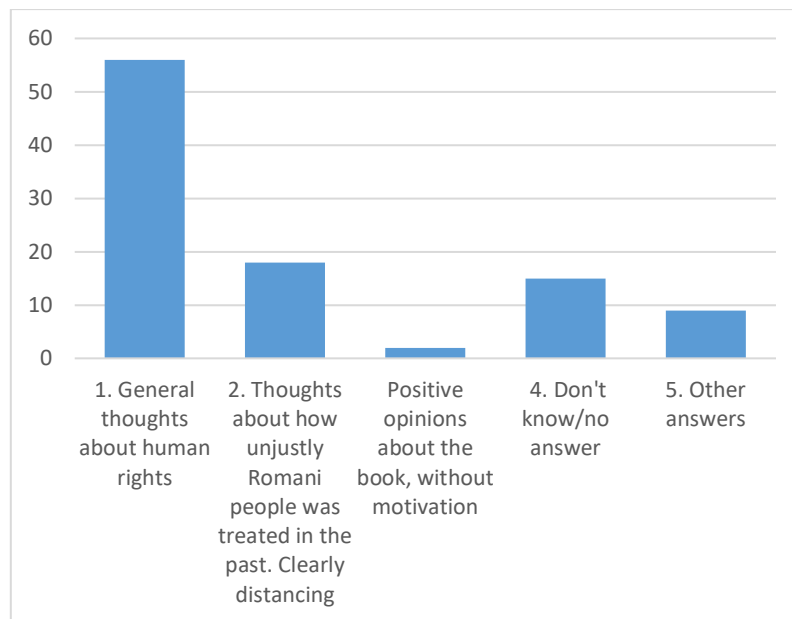


Figure 2. What do you think the book wants to say? What are your thoughts on the message? N=413. Outcome in per cent.

By far, the largest category of answers is category 1 (56%). It comprises answers emphasising, on a general level, that all people are equally valuable and that it is important to raise awareness of and work towards these human rights in the present, not just historically in connection with the difficult situation of the Romani people in Sweden during the 20th century. The idea that this needs to be highlighted even now appears in many of their answers:

S14: I think the book wants to say that all people should be treated equally. It's important, but it's not like that all over the world.

S15: I think it wants to say that many people are still not treated equally and that this is not a good thing.

S16: That everyone is equally valuable; I think it is a very good message that should be spread to people who have no idea about such things.

The second largest category, category 2 (18%), includes answers where injustice and discrimination against the Romani people are underlined through a strong distancing, but where the outward-looking reflection, beyond the novel, is absent. The racism and oppression towards the Romani depicted in the book are experienced as repulsive and horrible; however, they are seen as belonging to the past and "the way it used to be":

S17: That the Romani people had a very difficult time, and that they were treated very unfairly.

S18: The message is that the Romani people were not welcome in society.

S19: That it was racist before because people were [considered] different coming from another country.

When summarising, it can be observed how these two types of answers, which also appeared in the open-ended question, have changed places. The general reasoning about the equal value of

The general reasoning about the equal value of all people, emerging from the reading of the specific story of Katitzi, is noticeably more common when the question is asked in this message-oriented way

all people, emerging from the reading of the specific story of Katitzi, is noticeably more common when the question is asked in this message-oriented way. This could indicate that the process from an open entry to one that is more focused on what the book wants to convey makes students think in more general terms, that is, beyond what is directly depicted in the novel.

At the same time, it is reasonable to see the initial open reflection as an important step in the development towards a more analytical level of interpretation.

A small group of responses form category 3 (2%), comprising value judgments that are not motivated, such as "it was good". A larger group, category 4 (15%), includes answers such as "don't know" or "nothing". Thus, this is fewer than in the open-ended question, where the corresponding value is 22%. There were also other answers (9%), which form category 5. These answers spread out a lot and cannot be collected under any other heading than just *Other answers*.

In total, in this question, there were somewhat fewer responses that they do not know. There were also fewer students that left negative answers or answered in such a way that they did not express thoughts or feelings evolving during reading and discussing the book. On the other hand, there were more students who took a step back, out of the world of fiction and looked beyond the book, towards issues and situations that occur in the real world (Langer, 2017; Torell, 2002).

4.3. What can be learned from reading fiction?

In connection with the reasoning above, a brief summary of the responses to the general question *What can one learn from reading made-up stories (fiction)* can provide further and relevant perspectives. Here, there are three main outcomes visible in the responses (besides the 26% who answered "don't know" or "nothing"). The answers can be seen as linked, or related,

in the students’ common awareness that reading the novel has broadened their world and made them see things in new ways. The table below reflects the outcome.

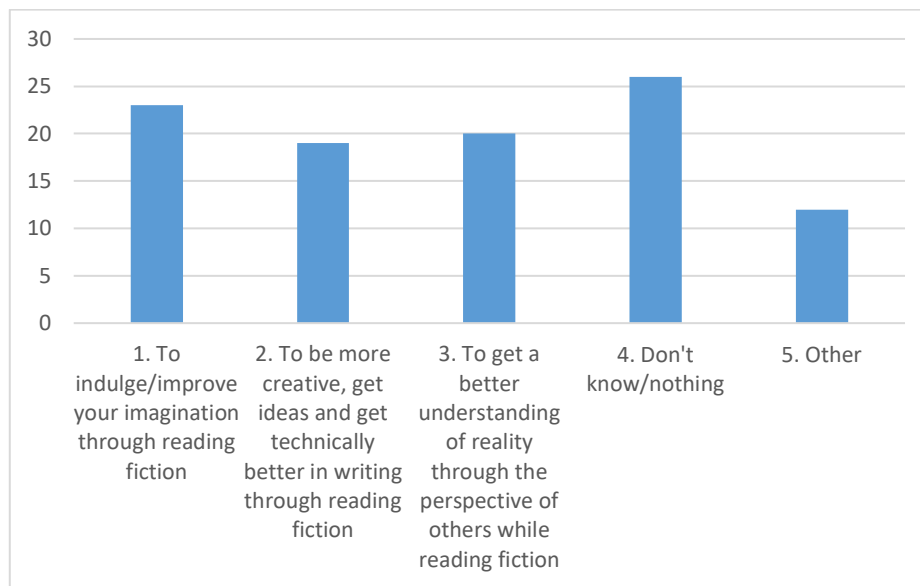


Figure 3. What can one learn from reading made-up stories (fiction)? N=413. Outcome in per cent.

The three main categories thus consist of the students’ perspectives on: A) how they experience that reading fiction /enhances their imagination (23%), B) that reading fiction develops creativity, ideas and the ability to write (19%) and C) that reading fiction develops an understanding of reality that is broadened through the perspectives of others that they empathise with and actually experience from inside the characters’ minds during reading (20%). In the latter category, there were some answers which, despite the general focus of the question, may suggest a connection to the reading of *Katitzi* such as:

S20: That it could be made up, but still be about someone being exposed to something they don't want to, or think it is unfair. It can also happen in reality.

S21: Even if what took place in the fictional stories didn't really happen, you can still learn quite a lot, e.g. how to become a better person, what you read can also help you cope with difficult situations. I also usually get motivation from the characters when I read.

S22: How others can experience their lives.

There are also answers within the third category that bring Aristotle's poetics to mind, in particular his reasoning about the literary writer's important task, which “is not to say what has happened, but what could happen” (Aristotle 1994, p. 37 f. Our translation). According to Aristotle, this fictional premise means, among other things, that the reader/viewer, through a

strong empathy when taking part in the fictional story, has a greater potential for developing thoughts and general perspectives compared to when reading factual texts (Cf. Nussbaum 2010; Nordberg, 2022b). This perspective is touched upon by some of the students:

S23: That it can be fun to read certain books even if it is not reality, and that you can read books to learn how reality could have been.

S24: You get better imagination and how it could be. For example, if it is about a third world war or something like that.

S25: You can learn more about how other people think. At the same time, you can get new ideas.⁵

Additionally, there are a handful of responses pointing out that reading can be a springboard into the future, and a realisation of dreams awakened through it. Some students touch upon the fun aspect of reading, without giving reasons in more detail: “I don't know. I mostly just do it because it's fun”. However, others bring up empathy as an answer to the question, in a sense that they can learn themselves something from the empathic experiences.

4.4. How can reading literature affect the view of the outside world?

Further on in the survey, the students were presented with questions about their experiences of discussing books in the classroom from different perspectives, about reading literature in relation to fictional depictions in other media, and about the importance of empathy in fiction. There is not room here to summarise the answers to these questions, even if they are relevant in different ways. Instead, one of the final questions in the survey where the students are given the opportunity to summarise their overall impressions of reading *Katitzi* and how it may have affected their view of the outside world, could serve as a kind of summary of this important part of reading fiction, described by Keen and Zimmerman (2003) as “text-to-world connection” (p. 75). The question reads: *Has reading the book influenced your way of looking at society and your surrounding environment? Explain how you are thinking.*

The difficulty of young readers to see and describe their own possible development, or their changed opinions and perspectives, despite previously testifying in the same survey about strong commitment in the stories and strong reading experiences, has been shown in other contexts (Nordberg, 2019). However, in the material we collected here, among *Katitzi* readers aged 9–12 who read and discussed the book together for four weeks, there are many answers

⁵ The emphasis is the authors’.

where it is evident that there is a kind of change in their outlook and perspective. Specifically, 34%, which corresponds to 140 students, express themselves in that direction. These responses have many similarities but vary slightly in their focus. One response type explains that working with the book has made them see and become aware of the ongoing racism that exists around them. Some typical examples:

S26: It has, because now I have realised that the world is more unfair, I think, and that people are not treated equally.

S27: Yes, I think about racism a lot.

S28: I notice things like this are more common, thanks to the book.

Another category of answers concerns how the reading provided new insights into society, and what can be called structural racism. In several responses, it also appears that an understanding has emerged and that it is experienced as meaningful, not least the understanding that the mechanisms of racism are still present and important to deal with, even at present:

S29: Yes, it really has. That society has actually treated some people badly.

S30: I wonder why you can't accept another ethnic group that just want somewhere to live and go to school.

S31: It has affected me because now I understand that people can treat others this badly.

A third group of responses is focused on how the students themselves want to act in the future, and includes general thoughts about humanity, with answers such as: ‘I look around more to see if someone is treating someone badly’, and ‘Yes. You shouldn't be mean’. With the wording of the question in mind, where the students are asked to explain whether reading the book affected how they look at society and their surroundings, these answers give the impression that something has actually happened and will have consequences. One student summarises concisely, responding to this complex question about what effect the reading may have had on the students’ way of looking at the surrounding society: ‘I think that everyone should read Katitzi’. This could be understood as a comment in the same direction, regarding vulnerability and the importance of a broader understanding to be able to work against discrimination of all kinds.

Another way for us to study the subject of how literary fiction can give a perspective on reality is by allowing students to place a value on a statement that is presented to them in the survey, both before and after reading: *It is common in our society today that people are treated better or worse because of their skin colour*. Alternatives are given on a five-point scale with *Not true*

at all at one end of the scale and *Completely true* at the other. The result shows that many of the students are engaged and have a clear opinion that there is discrimination currently taking place. In the comment field, where the students are asked to clarify how they have thought when they relate to this rather direct statement, detailed examples are given of how discrimination and racism are expressed both in their own locality and in the larger perspective. In total, 180 students, which makes up 44%, take a clear position against this negative differential treatment in the comments field of the post-survey. In the pre-survey, 25% took a similar position. Some typical examples from the post-survey are:

The result shows that many of the students are engaged and have a clear opinion that there is discrimination currently taking place.

S32: I think it's quite common for people to be treated better and some worse because of their skin colour and I think that's soooooo bad.

S33: Many people still think that if you are dark, you are less worthy.

S34: Every day in Sweden, people are treated differently because of their [skin colour] and it's horrible.

Some of the answers refer to social media, and what the students are exposed to there is, to some extent, related to what they read in more or less pronounced ways:

S35: I have heard it a lot on social media and as now in the book.

S36: I haven't heard anything, but I have seen on TikTok that those with dark skin colour are treated a little differently compared to those with light skin colour.

S37: I notice on social media that dark-skinned people are treated much worse.

As illustrated in the above examples, some students reason in general terms. However, the answers can also be perceived as applying, for example, to their own immediate neighbourhood. A recurring concrete example from the outside world here is the Black Lives Matter movement. That type of reasoning is more common after reading than before.

S38: In the US, the police killed people because of the colour of their skin, and that is not okay.

S39: It is not right that it is the way it is. I may not notice very much here in Sweden, but like BLM in the USA you notice more.

S40: BLACK LIVES MATTER 🌍 🌍 🌍 🌍

The students' reflections make clear that reading about a charismatic but severely exposed Romani girl in the late 1930s in Sweden can bring thoughts to the present world. Also, the

response shows that this present is seen by many in a different light and with a different understanding of how individual events are connected to values in society.

4.5. Teachers’ responses to the survey

To be able to discuss possibilities and difficulties for the students to develop as readers, the students’ responses to *Katitzi* are here connected with their teachers’ opinions on the students’ reading of the book. How do the teachers view and reflect on the need to discuss ethnic belonging and exclusion through *Katitzi* with their students? In what ways do they express opinions about their students’ reading of literary texts, in relation to other forms of texts? Do they have anything to say about the social relevance of fiction, and the relationship of fictional stories to the outside world? In order to be able to discuss the significance of their answers to these questions, the responses in the questionnaire that may contribute answers to the questions are now reported. Hence, the teachers’ written comments to questions 8, 12 and 17 in the survey are presented and discussed below. The teachers’ answers are then related to the students’ answers, which, in turn, opens the way for educational aspects of work with literary texts at school.

The same questions were asked before and after the students’ reading, which means that any differences in the interview answers could be noticed. The questions are presented verbatim, and are organised on the basis of the sub-titles presented below. As pointed out before, since only 14 out of the 28 teachers responded, i.e. the middle school teachers who read *Katitzi* with their students in the study, these teachers’ comments are considered to be non-numerical data, with no need for a presentation showing percentages of the results. Instead, the teachers’ comments to each question answered are addressed here; all their comments are presented below, and related to the themes and issues that research question 3 contains (summarized above).

4.6. Teachers’ perceptions of students’ attitudes towards multiculturalism

Before reading *Katitzi*, the teachers were asked to decide on the following statement: “In the group of students with whom I will read the book, some students have a reserved attitude towards people with a foreign background and towards a multicultural society”. One of the teachers then replied: “I have never heard or seen any such tendencies at all, thank God”, while another teacher wrote: “The students live in a smaller village, and there are not many here with

a foreign background". A third teacher commented: "Ignorance among some", while a fourth stated: "In one of my groups, there are some students who talk openly about 'immigrants' being this and that, and that they are criminals". In the teachers' responses after reading Katitzi, the following comments can be found: "In one of the groups, there are some who have a reserved attitude and are clear about it" and "It has happened that a few in the class have used negro as a word of abuse, and also called other people this".⁶ A third teacher highlights the following: "There is clearly a single student/class who has expressed prejudice about people with a foreign background or a multicultural society", while a fourth teacher stated that the students hide their thoughts in discussions. However, you can still "secretly hear their opinions at home". Other comments tend to be explanatory, like a comment indicating that the students answer as they do, since they want to demonstrate a "tough" attitude. As a whole, the teachers' response mirrors a complexity when dealing with questions having to do with multiculturalism at school. Since what the students express may be due to values at home, which the students are likely to be emotionally engaged with and feel the need to defend, an open and tolerant classroom climate and deepening dialogue is crucial when questions are discussed, related to multiculturalism (cf. Dressel, 2005).

4.7. Teachers' reasoning about literary texts in relation to other forms of texts

Since only 14 out of 28 teachers responded, it is worth pondering why not all of them responded. One reason could be lack of time since the teachers were asked to fill in the forms as part of their daily workload. Another reason may be that they found it difficult to participate and answer honestly; there is always a risk, with any survey, that respondents feel urged to adapt their answers to what they consider to be the "correct" answers. Since Katitzi is a book that depicts the subordination of a young girl because of the exclusion of the Romani in society, teachers might have been afraid of positioning themselves politically. This could have been the case, even if all questions to the teachers circled around their views on their students' perception of Katitzi.

Question 12 of the questionnaire was formulated before the literature work, as follows: "Do you usually emphasise to the students that reading fiction differs from other forms of texts?", and after reading Katitzi: "During your work with the book, have you come across differences between literary texts and other texts?" In the teachers' comments, the following can be found

⁶ This teacher actually misunderstood/misspelled the word "skällsord", which means word of abuse in Swedish. In the answer, this is written "själs ord" (= soul word in English).

before the reading: “Many of the students have more experience with non-fiction. Mainly those who are gaming”, and “Students expect to read non-fiction at school, so that's what they're set

Since Katitzi is a book that depicts the subordination of a young girl because of the exclusion of the Romani in society, teachers might have been afraid of positioning themselves politically.

on”. One teacher points out that students may find literary texts difficult because many students “see things in ‘black and white’”. Two teachers also testified that it is easier to read non-fiction because the students are more interested in this, while a third expressed that the students have difficulties verbally developing thoughts based on literary texts – the teacher thinks that reading

fiction presents difficulties for many students. A fourth teacher added that students were "scared" by reading texts. However, four teachers indicated that reading fiction can be positive: it is "more fun" and "more peaceful", according to two teachers; another teacher described that the students “empathise with the stories”. A fourth teacher wrote, “Fiction provides the opportunity for ‘closer’ text conversations”.

After reading fiction, a few teachers developed their answers that directly connect to the question of whether they “got into differences between literary texts and other texts”, but five teachers wrote that reading fiction is “freer for some students” and that it “sets them thinking more”. Among these five teachers, it is emphasised that fiction “attracts some students” to conversations and contributes to a “greater interest” in the questions, by “getting closer”. However, one teacher felt that the work “becomes more spread out” when working on literature, while another teacher saw no difference between working with literary and other texts. Worth noticing in this response from the teachers, is not that the teachers see advantages in making use of fiction in the classroom, but that they perceive difficulties in reading fiction that their students do not see; this lack of correspondence could be further explored in a future study.

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4.8. Teachers' thoughts on the social relevance of literature

Question 17 is formulated as a statement: “Literature and teaching literature have great social relevance”. Here, only one teacher left a comment before reading Katitzi; one teacher wrote

that we can “learn a lot about ourselves and about society through literature”. However, there were several comments after the reading. One teacher thought that fiction was “a useful tool for introducing students to discussions about important social issues”. Other aspects that the teachers highlight are opportunities to develop empathy and understanding “for someone/something”. One teacher wrote, “You can gain an understanding of someone/something you have not experienced yourself, which creates an understanding (as my students came up with).” In line with this, another teacher felt that fiction can generate a “historical understanding”, while another teacher thought that fiction was socially relevant because society is reflected in literature. Perhaps this is the least surprising response from the teachers, since the statement that the teachers were asked to relate to is hard to have any objections to. However, from an educational point of view, the response paves the way for literature to play a role in discussions about intrinsic societal problems.

5. Discussion and conclusions

This discussion begins with a follow-up to the first two research questions: 1) *What thoughts and reactions develop in the participating students during the joint reading and conversation about a fiction book that touches on difficult topics such as racism and exclusion? What role does the basic assumption that the story is a literary text, instead of non-fiction, play in student learning?* and 2) *In what ways do the students relate the events in the novel, reflecting the social and historical background of Romani people in Sweden, to their own lives and the world around them?*

The analysis of the students' responses provides interesting answers to both of these research questions, from an educational point of view. The results presented above show that the middle school students' thoughts have been formulated and developed in relation to the novel's content; here, empathy for the main character, “Katitzi”, seems to have played a decisive role. The majority of the readers, namely 76% (for the open question, see figure 1) and 74% (for the message question, see figure 2), have clearly formulated their thoughts about ethnicity and diversity (meaning that the readers relate to Katitzi's situation). Consciously, as shown, they reflect on discrimination and injustice, which have their basis in ethnic affiliation and racism. The students also, albeit to varying degrees, reason about how the oppression depicted in the book during the late 1930s in Sweden has connections to what has happened later in history – and also to what is happening nowadays (Black Lives Matter).

In the students' answers to questions about how they understand the content of *Katitzi*, and if they feel that the book influenced their way of looking at contemporary society, this type of

world-oriented reasoning, where the gaze is raised beyond the direct action of the book (cf. Langer, 2017), becomes more frequent. Similar lines of thought, such as, for example, that discrimination due to skin colour also continues in our time, are expressed in answers to questions asked in the survey about what one can possibly learn from reading fiction.

Hence, a large group of students, grounded in their reading, reason about current social events both in the outside world and in their own immediate environment. The ability, or the literary competence, to be able to create a kind of analytical distance and relate the reading experience to the real world, after entering and being involved in situations in the fictional world, has repeatedly been highlighted as central in literary reading. The understanding of fictionality itself is viewed as an important key in this indirect process (see e.g. Langer, 2017; Keen & Zimmerman, 2003; Torell, 2002). Recurringly during the 2000s, it has been underlined that children and young people in Sweden often practise a purely subjective reading, misunderstanding the unique nature of literary fiction (for an overview, see Nordberg, 2017) with the consequence that everything that happens in literature is perceived as having connections to the authors’ real life (see e.g. Olin-Scheller, 2006; Årheim, 2007). In this study, very few students have this subjective and direct understanding of the novel, despite the biographical connection between the author and the story. At the same time, it is clear that they have reacted affectively to the story of Katitzi (Felski, 2008; cf. Nordberg, 2022a; 2022b). The criticism against affective reading, that is, saying that the thoughts and impressions stay with the reader's own emotional world, and that the reading becomes trivial and subjective instead of objective, outward looking and analytical (see e.g. Agrell, 2009; Thorson, 2009), is not at all justified here. Instead, the results show how the participating middle school students were not only engaged in the book and the talks about it. Many of them were also able to develop their thoughts beyond the events in the fictional world, in ways where value-based questions about human rights are actualised. A similar reasoning can be found in the answers to questions about the relationship between the fictional world and the surrounding here and now.

[...]the results show how the participating middle school students were not only engaged in the book and the talks about it. Many of them were also able to develop their thoughts beyond the events in the fictional world, in ways where value-based questions about human rights are actualised.

On the basis of the teachers' answers in the survey, the following is important: Teachers believe that some of their students have “a reserved attitude towards people with a foreign background and towards a multicultural society”. They give a number of explanations for this, including that

their students live in socio-culturally homogenous environments, and that parents may express doubts about immigration at home. It is worth noting that one of the teachers highlights the difficulty of students being silent during discussions. The reason for this, according to the teacher, is that students experience problems when identifying with the main character (Katitzi) and have difficulty handling demands to express themselves “correctly” in terms of values in the classroom. This, in turn, could be related to Dressel’s research (Dressel, 2005), stressing the role of teachers as colearners, negotiating aspects of multiculturalism and difference, taking into account that some voices are more dominant than others in the classroom.

Also, the answers to the question “what makes literary texts special in this context” are crucial, since the teachers’ perceptions that students prefer to read non-fiction can be problematized through the students’ responses. However, in order to increase knowledge about how the teachers’ pre-understanding influences their students’ views, another study is needed. Nonetheless, the response to the statement that literary texts are important for increasing the interest in social circumstances (question 17) is interesting— as one of the teachers puts it (when commenting on the use of literary texts): “You can gain an understanding of someone/something you have not experienced yourself, which creates an understanding (as my students arrived at)” ; here, it might be that the teacher’s reflection on this influences his or her teaching in the future, since teaching is always dependent on meta-cognitive reflection.

To sum up, it is possible to make some educational points. First, the survey tells us that joint reading and conversation about a literary text opens the way for reflections from students about norms and power-relations, both individually and on a group level (cf. Dressel, 2005). The study shows, grounded in a large group of young readers, that an engaging fictional story that touches on difficult topics, such as ethnicity, racism and discrimination, leads to commitment and in-depth learning among students. Even if this potential of fiction and literary conversations to develop empathy and democratic values has been highlighted (c.f. Alkestrand, 2016; Molloy, 2017; Nussbaum, 2010; Rosenblatt, 2002), the fact that literary texts matter to students – if they get the opportunity to express themselves about their reading – to a large extent remains empirically unexplored (Miall, 2006; Pettersson, 2015).

The crucial question though is whether, and to what extent, students’ thoughts are taken advantage of when it comes to the negotiation of who they are and aim at being, collectively, in society (cf. Bruner, 2002). From a societal perspective, not making use of the students’ concerns about ethnic belonging and exclusion seems to be a loss, and here the teachers’ views are crucial. Since the teachers doubt that their students are capable of reading literary texts like

Katitzi, there is a risk that the students’ possibilities to develop as human beings (through reading) are limited (Fives & Buehl, 2012; Kalaja et al., 2015). Here, the survey paves the way for a future study, focusing on the relation between teachers’ views on literary texts and their students’ ability to develop their thinking from their reading. This is worth exploring, for how can readers develop if teachers do not reflect on their influence on their students’ possibilities to develop by reading literary texts?

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Reading Literary Texts with an Ecocritical Consciousness in the Anthropocene

La lectura de textos literarios con conciencia ecocrítica en el
Antropoceno

La lectura de textos literaris amb consciència ecocrítica a
l'Antropocé

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Abstract

Analyzing empirically the responses of undergraduate students to the short stories they read in an elective English course, this paper interrogates the effect of guided reading on students' comprehension of the reading material and compares their initial responses to the texts with those given after the lecture. The instructor of the course prepared a syllabus that mostly includes stories of the Anthropocene, theoretically the last geological era which points to excessive human control of the ecosystem. It was observed that students' lack of knowledge about the term caused them to miss the ecological concern of the stories and make textual analysis focusing mostly on thematic characteristics. Individual reading, reading after the lecture and discussions in class revealed that guided reading questions helped students familiarize with the concept and develop new perspectives during reading. They reread the texts with a new concern about ecological collapse, environmental ethics, as well as animal and plant rights. The ambiguity of the stories lies in the fact that they are neither stories of hope nor dystopian narratives, but rather texts that portray the individual as the responsible agent. Therefore, re-reading the texts of the Anthropocene with the help of guided reading questions enabled students to question their own responsibility in ecological collapse and to come up with new questions as to the steps to be taken. The use of guided reading questions also made it possible for the instructor to bridge the gap between scientific and literary accounts of the Anthropocene. Another positive outcome of the course was that the students were motivated to make ecocritical readings of classical narratives they were already familiar with in addition to readings of more recent stories.

Key words: Anthropocene, guided reading, ecocritical literature, non-human, active reading.

Resumen

A través del análisis empírico de las respuestas del alumnado universitario a los cuentos cortos que leyó en un curso electivo de inglés, este documento interroga el efecto de la lectura guiada en la comprensión del material de lectura por parte de los estudiantes y compara sus respuestas iniciales a los textos con las dadas después de la clase. La profesora del curso preparó un plan de estudios que incluye principalmente historias del Antropoceno, teóricamente la última era geológica que señala el control excesivo de los humanos sobre el ecosistema. Se observó que la falta de conocimiento de los estudiantes sobre el término hizo que pasaran por alto la preocupación ambiental de las historias y realizaran un análisis textual centrado principalmente en las características temáticas. La lectura individual, la lectura después de la clase y las discusiones en clase revelaron que las preguntas de lectura guiada ayudaron al alumnado a familiarizarse con el concepto y a desarrollar nuevas perspectivas durante la lectura. Se volvió a leer los textos con una nueva preocupación por el colapso ecológico, la ética ambiental, así como por los derechos de los animales y las plantas. La ambigüedad de las historias radica en el hecho de que no son ni historias de esperanza ni narrativas distópicas, sino más bien textos que retratan al individuo como el agente responsable. Por lo tanto, volver a leer los textos del Antropoceno con la ayuda de preguntas de lectura guiada permitió a los estudiantes cuestionar su propia responsabilidad en el colapso ecológico y plantear nuevas preguntas sobre los pasos a seguir. El uso de preguntas de lectura guiada también permitió a la profesora cerrar la brecha entre los relatos científicos y literarios del Antropoceno. Otro resultado positivo del curso fue que el alumnado se sintió motivado para realizar lecturas ecocríticas de narrativas clásicas con las que ya estaban familiarizados, además de las lecturas de historias más recientes.

Palabras clave: Antropoceno, lectura guiada, literatura ecocrítica, no-humano, lectura activa

Resum

A través de l'anàlisi empírica de les respostes d'estudiantat universitari als contes curts que van llegir en un curs electiu d'anglès, aquest document qüestiona l'efecte de la lectura guiada en la comprensió del material de lectura per part de l'alumnat i compara les seues respostes inicials als textos amb les donades després de la classe. La professora del curs va preparar un pla d'estudis que inclou principalment històries de l'Antropocè, teòricament l'última era geològica que apunta al control excessiu dels humans sobre l'ecosistema. Es va observar que la manca de coneixement dels estudiants sobre el terme va fer que passaren per alt la preocupació ambiental de les històries i realitzaren una anàlisi textual centrada principalment en les característiques temàtiques. La lectura individual, la lectura després de la classe i les discussions a classe van revelar que les preguntes de lectura guiada van ajudar l'estudiantat a familiaritzar-se amb el concepte i a desenvolupar noves perspectives durant la lectura. Es va tornar a llegir els textos amb una nova preocupació pel col·lapse ecològic, l'ètica ambiental, així com pels drets dels animals i les plantes. L'ambigüitat de les històries rau en el fet que no són ni històries d'esperança ni narratives distòpiques, sinó més prompte textos que retraten l'individu com a agent responsable. Per tant, tornar a llegir els textos de l'Antropocè amb l'ajuda de preguntes de lectura guiada va permetre a l'alumnat qüestionar la seua pròpia responsabilitat en el col·lapse ecològic i plantejar noves preguntes sobre els passos a seguir. L'ús de preguntes de lectura guiada també va permetre a la professora tancar la bretxa entre els relats científics i literaris de l'Antropocè. Un altre resultat positiu del curs va ser que l'estudiantat es va sentir motivat per fer lectures ecocrítiques de narratives clàssiques amb les quals ja estaven familiaritzats, a més de les lectures de històries més recents.

Paraules clau: Antropocè, lectura guiada, literatura ecocrítica, no-humà, lectura activa.

1. Introduction

An act as early as human existence, reading has occupied an essential part in the lives of individuals for various reasons. People have read for entertainment, instruction, and profession. As the social and cultural conditions have changed, the nature of reading has also taken different forms. Notwithstanding the motives behind it, reading has always included a subtle interaction between the reader and the writer of a text. In this respect, it is not merely an act of deciphering meaning “given in advance” but recreating it through “interaction between writers and readers as participants in a particular communication situation” (Harris, 2005, p. 214). This interactive nature of reading also makes it judged as an act of meaning-making. Texts are rewritten in every single reading since the expectations as well as the cultural and ideological background of every single reader vary.

When reading literary texts, in particular, cultural and national barriers between the reader and the writer are evaded when the former realizes that the call of literature is beyond language. In other words, reading literature arouses new questions and creates new meanings about the condition of being human. As the act of reading and the conditions determining it undergo tremendous changes, reader perceptions and how they approach the current reality around them change accordingly. The modes of reading alter quite rapidly with the rise of electronic texts and computer-assisted reading practices. People find themselves as readers amidst a bombardment of various texts on screens, billboards, news, electronic and printed books as well as magazines and newspapers. It is frequently acknowledged that technological advances widen the gap between the text and the reader, particularly for those resistant readers who still desire printed books in their hands. Contrary to what Roger Chartier (1992) points at as the third element in the text-reader relationship, the book as a material product is no longer in the hands of the reader. In addition to the “meaning” as well as the social and historical factors that determine the reading process, the book as a “material production” also influences the “actualization” of texts (p. 50). Currently, however, the physical affinity of the reader to the text is challenged by the rapid spread of tablets, e-readers and e-books. This virtual relationship of the reader with the text reveals the distanced position of the individual in every aspect of life, starting in the late 20th century. People have gradually distanced themselves from their family members, friends and neighbors and started to live more secluded lives. Remote working and distance learning opportunities have led to a more individualistic way of life with limited sharing and interaction. Getting more and more distanced from groups and gatherings while becoming more accustomed to screens indoors has cut their ties with Nature as well. People have forgotten the very basic fact that they are an integral part of the large ecosystem together with

non-human beings like animals, plants, and non-living entities in the environment. The “recent rupture” used by many Earth System scientists to address the extensive human impact on ecology can metaphorically be used to refer to the deepening rifts between Nature and human beings (Hamilton, 2016, p. 77). In this respect, the literature of the late 20th and 21st centuries presents an alternative medium to reconsider Human-Nature relations.

Considering that literature is all about existence and that it is a never-ending attempt by human readers to comprehend life, it is not unusual that literature provides answers while complicating the reality even further. Within the havoc of the 21st century, it is no longer possible to find solace in readings of Nature as the Romantics once did, nor is it possible to reflect human experience on the pages as the 19th century realists did. Contemporary literature today inevitably turns its face to beings other than human as it adopts a more earth-centered approach. Interrogating the relationship of human with the non-human, a new concern with ecology is found in the literary texts of the last decades. Although there are arguments that readers are tempted to question whether it is possible to consider human characters as “antagonists” to Nature, ecocritical literature questions this premise by avoiding oppositions like Human/Nature and Human/Non-human (Struck, 2017, p. 17). Ecocritical readings of canonical texts abound together with the emergence of new texts and genres, which necessitate new readings mindful of the issues addressed by the Anthropocene epoch.

Considering that literature is all about existence and that it is a never-ending attempt by human readers to comprehend life, it is not unusual that literature provides answers while complicating the reality even further.

This article presents undergraduate engineering students’ receptions of literary texts from an ecocritical perspective in the ‘Short Stories’ course focusing on their initial reactions to the texts and responses to close reading and guided reading questions just after class discussion. It is obvious in this one-term study that student receptions of the texts change significantly during in-class practices, which also reveals that:

- students are not quite familiar with the concept of neither ecocriticism nor Anthropocene.
- they have an anthropocentric approach to works of literature.
- reading literature from an ecocritical perspective makes them question their relation to Nature and non-human beings.
- readings of literary texts are not necessarily limited to distanced textual analysis.

2. Ecocritical readings in the age of the Anthropocene

The Anthropocene is defined as a new and the latest geological era determined predominantly by human beings. Focusing on the effects of the climate change, studies about this epoch try to underline the human impact on ecology and human-related causes of natural disasters. Although the definition is just a proposal, therefore an unofficial one, it has already aroused tremendous interest in academia. Crutzen and Stoermer's article 'The Anthropocene' (2000) is regarded as the first study to argue that the Holocene has ended and human beings now live in a new epoch called the Anthropocene. This article was followed by similar articles such as 'Geology of Mankind' (Crutzen, 2002), 'The Anthropocene: a new epoch of geological time?' (Zalasiewicz et al., 2011), and three scientific journals: *The Anthropocene*, *The Anthropocene Review*, and *Elementa* (Lewis & Maslin, 2015). Notwithstanding the disagreements about when the Anthropocene started or whether the current epoch can be officially defined as the Anthropocene, studies in Social Sciences and the Humanities have already started to document human impact on geology. Literature, Arts and Cultural Studies, similarly, have engaged with this concept and reflected how human beings view themselves in relation to Nature. The literature of the Anthropocene era is challenging as it defies previous human-centered approach of many writers and readers to the texts:

We are used to narrative trajectories – indeed, we make sense of the world through narrative trajectories – that operate on the human scale, curtailed temporally (usually within the lifetime of a single human being; certainly, only very rarely extending beyond two or three generations), spatially (being focused through one location at any given narrative moment) and existentially (with meaning defined in human terms). The Anthropocene challenges us to think beyond these perspectives, to think beyond the human even though we inevitably cannot escape that subject position. (De Cristofaro & Cordle, 2018, p. 3).

As Cristofaro and Cordle underline, one significant characteristics of Anthropocene literature is its turn from human to the planet, from the official history of individuals to the history of the Earth. It encompasses literary works ranging from science fiction to climate fiction produced particularly after the 2000s. Anthropocene literature refers to the literature produced with the consciousness that we –human beings– have a tremendous impact on the planet. Therefore, it is dystopian and dark in nature. Ecocritical literature, on the other hand, has a longer history dating back the 1970s. Encompassing nature writing and environmental criticism, it requires readers to reconsider their relationship with nature and non-human beings. The term

'ecocriticism' was coined by William Rueckert in his essay *Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism* in 1978 in which he defined the readers and critics as "responsible planet

Despite the attempts to conceptualize it as an ideological structure particularly within the formalist, new historicist and even deconstructivist movement, Nature has now emerged as a physical body, an entity and a character itself in works of literature.

stewards" (114). This essay is found in one of the most cited books about ecocriticism, *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology* (1996) edited by Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm. As early as in the 1996, Glotfelty (1996) listed environmental studies among the "hot topics of the late twentieth century" together with race, class, and gender (p. xvi). The prolific 1990s were also the years when Greta Garrard published her books *Ecofeminism: Women, Animals, Nature* (1993) and *Ecological Politics: Ecofeminists and the Greens* (1998), both

of which provoked questions about environmental ethics and the rights of the environment. Ecocritical readings of canonical texts, classical tales as well as contemporary novels, short stories and poems have increased in the 21st century in line with the rising popularity of Anthropocene literature. As an era of environmental crisis and disasters, the 21st century has made it necessary both to turn to Anthropocene fiction of the last two decades and to reinterpret fictions of the previous decades and centuries from an ecocritical perspective. Ever since the Romantic period, which regarded Nature only in harmony with human mind and senses, the tendency to conceptualize Nature as a cultural, social and political structure has been questioned. Despite the attempts to conceptualize it as an ideological structure particularly within the formalist, new historicist and even deconstructivist movement, Nature has now emerged as a physical body, an entity and a character itself in works of literature. As Laurence Coupe has emphasized in his book *The Green Studies Reader: From Romanticism to Ecocriticism* (2000), this approach has enabled to invite Nature to language from an ethical point of view (pp. 2-4). While the culmination of an anthropocentric approach to the texts is required, literary texts have also aroused new questions about the agency of human beings. Literary texts that place human beings at a responsible position mostly use elements of fantasy to present either dystopian narratives or narratives of escape and alienation. Most of these stories inevitably avoid a definite end, leaving it to the readers to finish the story in their mind.

3. Methodology

The study conducted during the fall term of an undergraduate elective course at Istanbul Technical University focuses on 18 engineering and 4 Genetics and Molecular Biology department students' receptions of short stories and literary narratives that can be read from an ecocritical perspective as well. Among ecocritical narratives, students read *The Boy Who Talked with Animals* (1977/1982) by Roald Dahl and *Beyond the Woods* (2021) by Aslı Karataş. Furthermore, the syllabus also included classical narratives open to ecocritical readings. In this category, they read *The Giving Tree* (1964/2014) by Shel Silverstein and *The Day Boy and the Night Girl* (1882) by George MacDonald. Julius Lester's *Let's Talk About Race* (2008) was analyzed with the purpose of underlining the relation between ecocriticism and postcolonial studies. The short story *She Unnames Them* (1985) by Ursula K. Le Guin further helped students elaborate on ecofeminism.

The course is divided into two sections. In the first section, the students were asked to write a brief response to the story they had read by answering the questions "What are the ecocritical elements in this story?" and "How is nature exemplified in the text?". Since these responses were collected before class discussion, they reflected the genuine reactions of the students to the written and visual material. These responses have unveiled that students have different reading strategies when they read a literary text themselves and when they are guided to reread it from a certain perspective – ecocritical or ecofeminist and by giving specific attention to the use of literary devices such as metaphors in the text.

After collecting written student responses, the instructor gave a fifteen-minute break to have a quick look at the responses. In the second session, she used guided reading questions which entailed students to give direct references to the stories during in-class discussion. The students were divided into informal groups of 3 or 4 to share their ideas with each other. They were asked to find certain passages which demonstrate human-non-human interaction, animal exploitation, land destruction as well as important symbols and nature imagery. In some weeks, students used notecards to write their group ideas while in some other weeks, multimedia tools such as Mentimeter or Ninova were used to post their ideas instantly.

Comparing the responses of students written at the beginning of the lesson with those given to guided questions, it was found that the former were highly general and did not reflect the ecocritical concern in the texts whereas guided reading questions enriched the discussions and helped students comprehend the literary theory with specific examples from reading materials. The written responses also indicated that students were unable to read a literary text in line

with a literary theory themselves even after the introductory lectures on the theory. Consequently, guided reading questions functioned as supplementary materials distributed every week to relate the story to ecocritical literary theory. They were answered orally during class discussions and mostly focused on finding certain passages revealing ecocritical concern and understanding the elements of story, particularly the style of the author. The use of informal and formal small groups as well as multimedia tools such as mind maps and polls increased interaction and lessened the anxiety of some students to talk in public.

4. Responses from students

It is important to note that none of the 22 students in the class have heard the term ecocriticism before and it is revealed during the study that their lack of information about ecocritical theory affected their reading experience to a large extent. Firstly, most of them reported that they did not expect the texts to arouse discussion about human-nonhuman relation. It is not surprising considering that ecocriticism has only recently become a subject of academic study in Turkey. The number of published articles interrogating human/non-human relation and representations of nature in literary texts is quite limited. The number of institutions and centers that foster ecocritical studies in different departments is not sufficient either. Secondly, the answers of students to many of the after-reading questions changed after the instructor's brief lecture on ecocritical theory. Understanding what ecocriticism addresses enabled them to reconsider the texts they had read before from a new perspective. The reevaluation of classical texts, in particular, from an ecocritical perspective has necessitated to reconsider characterization, organizational structure and language patterns in the texts.

4.1. The Boy Who Talked with Animals (Dahl, 1977/1982)

Roald Dahl's short story, published in his collection *The Wonderful Story of Henry Sugar and Six More* (1977/1982), revolves around the exploitation of a giant turtle by humans and a boy's dedicated efforts to save it. Set in a Jamaican island, the story has a number of characters such as a hotel owner, tourists visiting the island, a small boy and his family, and a fisherman. As an ecocritical narrative, it includes a number of important passages that reveal the conflict between human and nonhuman beings. The written answers the students gave at the beginning of the lesson revealed that they read the text as an adventure story in which a small boy bravely stands out as the savior of a helpless turtle. In none of the papers there was a direct reference to ecocriticism although the students pointed at the bad treatment of the turtle by the tourists on the island. The responses were mostly summaries of what happens in the story, lacking in-depth

analysis of the text, characterization and the setting. There was almost no reference to the supernatural end of the story, which is actually open to many different readings.

The instructor used active reading tools to draw the attention of students to the passages describing the boy in conflict with the tourists and the hotel owner, thereby elaborating further on the ecocritical aspect of the narrative. Since the electronic version of the text was distributed to the students together with its hardcopy, it became possible to apply social annotation (SA) tools to make comments on the text. The instructor reflected the electronic document on the board, divided the students into six groups of three and asked them to underline important passages that revealed the tension between the child protagonist and the people on the island. Influenced by the extensive literature review by Novak et al. (2012) listing the positive impacts of SA tools in Higher Education, the instructor experimented with highlighting and annotating on a given electronic text in a physical setting. The students found it easier to underline and write comments on the electronic text than to verbally express themselves in the class. They underlined the words used by the author to present an unfavorable portrayal of the tourists. Three out of seven groups found the same words and pointed at the same passages.

Second, the instructor wanted to hear the responses of students about the end of the story. The disappearance of the boy on the back of the giant turtle obviously carries supernatural elements and these unrealistic characteristics of the story, which includes significantly realistic descriptions of the setting and characters, gave way to quite different readings. At this point the instructor used the message box on Ninova in order to invite students to synchronously share their comments about the ending. Reading the comments of their peers enables the students to revise their thoughts, think of follow-up questions to ask, thereby improving their “critical thinking” and “evaluative” skills (Johnson et al., 2010, p. 1498). While some students interpreted the end as the boy’s reaction to the cruel reality of animal exploitation and an escape story into an alternative reality, four students related it to suicide and the boy’s death. It is significant to note that all the students read the story as a dark narrative with a sad ending. The guided reading questions the instructor used obviously motivated the students to join the discussion about ecocritical literature, an area they did not feel familiar with. The questions also made them consider the notion of “eco-social hierarchy” by drawing attention to the different attitudes of adults and a child towards the turtle. Since the adult characters do not show any sign of empathy, even after the persuading speech of the boy, the narrative does not promise a happy ending. Rather, it underlines the persistent power dynamics that places human at the top of the hierarchy and the nonhuman in service. Focusing on Dahl’s preference to use long descriptions of the setting with a particular emphasis on the coexistence of different life forms as well as the

discussions regarding the end of the story made it possible for the students to relate the text to ecocritical theory and read the story from a less human-centered perspective.

4.2. The Giving Tree (Silverstein, 1964/2014)

Shel Silverstein's (1964/2014) canonical book has long been read by readers of all ages and aroused controversies among readers and critics. It is about the relationship between a tree and a boy who grows to be an old man in the narrative. Although the boy and the tree are friends at the beginning of the book, the narrative takes a quite saddening tone as the boy gradually grows more and more self-centered, always demanding new things from the tree. The tree, referred as "she" by the author, consents and does whatever the boy/man wants to the extent of self-sacrifice. Students were given this picturebook in class in Week 5 –just after *The Boy Who Talked with Animals*– and they were asked to read the lines and analyze the illustrations in 20 minutes. When they completed their reading, the instructor firstly asked whether they had read a picturebook before. Among 22 students, only 3 gave a positive answer, which also reflected the early childhood reading culture of young adults (18-22 ages) in Turkey. Considering that they were unfamiliar with the genre, the instructor explained the main features of picturebooks, stating that they make extensive use of imagery and have limited use of texts. She also asked them to consider why picturebooks are actually read with great interest by not necessarily children but adults as well. One of the students who previously had picturebook reading experience stated that picturebooks convey their messages more powerfully than words and they are memorable. The instructor's question "What is one thing that sticks to your mind after reading the book?" received the same answer from almost all the students. Giving their answers via an interactive multimedia tool (Mentimeter), the students typed "the tree" as their answer. The follow-up question "What makes the tree memorable for the reader?" was answered similarly with a common focus on the self-sacrificing attitude of the tree and its decreasing physical presence in the illustrations. These three after-reading questions gave ample idea to the instructor about students' reception of the book. They all read it as a story of loss as the tree constantly and willingly gives whatever the boy demands to the extent of self-annihilation. However, the oral and written responses of the students reflected thematic analysis and did not refer to the visual aspect of the book.

In order to relate the book to ecocritical studies the instructor encouraged students to make visual reading and focus on iconic representations of the tree on the pages. Previous lectures on ecocriticism helped them to make a critical reading of the text; however, most of them failed to

interpret the illustrations as visual texts. They could not, for instance, give any answer to “Why certain pages are left blank by Silverstein?”. Neither could they decipher the details on the page properly, which very clearly reflected what Nodelman (1999) described as the fate of picturebooks to remain “beneath serious critical notice” (p. 70). Students’ lack of picturebook reading experience caused them to undermine the organizational structure of the text which predominantly relies on illustrations rather than text. It became clear during the discussions that students had read the story in a very short time focusing only on the text and neglecting to interpret the drawings. The instructor, therefore, gave students fifteen minutes and asked them to think about the pictures they encountered everyday about ecological issues such as natural disasters, climate crisis, animal exploitation, and deforestation. She particularly led students to realize the abundance of visual material in daily life, which Gombrich (1972) rightly calls “a visual age”. Underlining Gombrich’s assertion that people were living in “a historical epoch in which the image [would] take over from the written word” (p. 82), the instructor wanted students to remember sample images that warned people about climate crisis and ecological collapse. At the end of fifteen minutes, students mentioned a number of advertisements seen on billboards around the city, conference and seminar handouts with eye-catching visuals in the campus and visual alerts prepared by non-governmental organizations. A relatively long discussion about the effects of such images on people’s perception of ecological disasters motivated students to reinterpret the illustrations in Silverstein’s (1964/2014) book as a visual text.

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Iconic representations on the pages were elaborated during class discussion with the purpose of leading students to make visual reading rather than getting stuck in the literal meaning of the text. The tree was considered as an iconic character with its trunks that look like arms holding the boy and hugging him with care and affection. Personification of the tree in the narrative serves two ends. Firstly, the distinction between human and nonhuman is erased by showing the tree as no different from the boy. Secondly, iconic representation helps the reader be a part of narrative reality, which subtly places the boy at a responsible position for the loss the tree experiences. In this way, the iconic representations in the book necessitates a critical reading at the end of which the reader questions his/her role as the agent of environmental crisis.

4.3. *She Unnames Them* (Le Guin, 1985)

The discussion of the ecofeminist short story *She Unnames Them* (1985) by science-fiction and fantasy writer Ursula K. Le Guin followed the lecture on *The Giving Tree* (Silverstein, 1964/2014) in the light of the discussions held before about ecocriticism and ecofeminism. The instructor opened the discussion by reminding the students of ecofeminist readings of Silverstein's (1964/2014) book referring to the tree as "she" and portraying it as the source of motherly love. The parallelism between the exploitation of nature and women, a point which ecofeminist literature both underlines and criticizes, formed the background of the in-class discussions. Since the story presents a rather difficult reading experience, it was necessary to start with a quick plot summary to check students' comprehension of the text. The warm-up questions "Did you find the story dark or hopeful?" and "What is the tone of the story?" divided the class into two: One group of students expressed their dislike of the story due to the complicated sentence structure it includes and to the conveyed premise that human beings are vulnerable to the manipulative power of language. The second group, on the other hand, underlined the use of metaphors in the narrative which enables the reader –as well as the writer– to experiment with language. The discussion of Le Guin's story revealed how the title of a literary text determines the expectations of the reader. The verb "un-name" obviously led the students to focus on the deconstructive act of taking names back. The female character of the story, Eve of the creation story, unnames the animals and gives her own name to Adam as well. The students mostly focused on the gender dynamics in the story, defining Eve's act of unname as a sign of defiance and rebellion against Adam, who obviously represents the male rule-making authority. The ecofeminist undertones of the story; however, were not discerned by the students. It was only after the instructor guided them to read Eve's decision of unname animals as an attempt to unite with them that human/non-human relation was analyzed. The instructor decided, at this point, to use informal small groups to foster active reading in the classroom. The students were divided in pairs and they were asked to find passages or lines that reflect Eve's attempts to unite with Nature. This small group activity enabled the whole class to make a closer reading of the text by focusing on power dynamics in Nature.

Another benefit of the small group activity is to engage the students who came to the class without having read the story in advance or who hesitated to share their receptions of the text. Using Lyman's (1981) "think-pair-share" strategy to foster active reading, the instructor initially wanted students to individually find and underline the passages that show Eve's unity with Nature. At the end of five minutes allocated for this task, she asked them to turn to one of their classmates and share the lines underlined. Another five minutes were given for this second

phase. The pair were then asked to point at the lines they had chosen with reasons and explanations behind their choice. This close reading of the story with the participation of the whole class enabled complete engagement as well as “immediate gauge of the degree and quality of student understanding of course content” (Cooper & Robinson, 2000, p. 18). Listing an extensive number of approaches to teaching in college classrooms, Cooper and Robinson’s article in *New Directions for Teaching and Learning* emphasizes the role of active learning strategies in engaging college students in discussions and productive work. The use of different prompts, group work, and short written assignments all encourage students to actively participate in class rather than being passive recipients of the lectures. Formal and informal group activities, in particular, foster pair learning and instant feedback both from their friends and the instructor. In this way, they have a different learning experience and realize that there are multiple readings of the same text. Informal small group choice of the instructor relieved the students who had difficulty in reading and understanding *She Unnames Them* (Le Guin, 1985) by leaving them time and space to listen to how others had read it. In other words, the ambiguity of the text is lessened as there is more sharing.

4.4. Let’s Talk About Race (Lester, 2005)

American writer Julius Lester’s picturebook *Let’s Talk About Race* (2005) invites readers of all ages to a lyrical account of racial history. Starting with the literary premise “I am a story”, the book makes readers view their lives as stories worth telling. Pointing at common characteristics of human existence such as a particular day and place of birth and a given name, Lester (2005) also mentions certain elements of each person’s stories like favorite food, color, time of day, religion and nationality. All these elements and common traits of existence subtly hints at the notion of equality present at birth for every human being. However, when it comes to talk about the issue of race, the similar stories of different people turn into a story of dominance. The twist, also a literal plot twist in the narrative, divides human stories into two: stories before and after race. The instructor opened the lecture with a question, given as a prompt to raise questions about different forms of exploitation. She asked students to think about different forms of dominance. Among the responses, sexual and economic dominance were the most quickly given ones. There were also a few students who referred to political dominance and dominance related to age. This warm-up question was followed by two other questions designed to stimulate class discussion about race and its relation to ecocritical theory. Giving the students ten minutes to think, the instructor asked a challenging question that is not easy to answer in public: Have you ever thought your life as a story? Not surprisingly, almost all the students

remained silent at the end of the given time. One of the students expressed that his life was a story of struggle since he had coped with a difficult illness and economic hardships. Another student referred to moments of success in her life and defined her life as a story of dedication. The lack of answers could be attributed to unwillingness to talk about one's life or the failure to find moments worth mentioning. Restating the difficulty to talk about one's life, thereby showing empathy to the students, the instructor divided students into formal groups of four and asked them to write a short paragraph answering why Lester refers to race as a story too.

Considering the possibility "to reconceive classes as the unique social places [...] where students and teachers interact in personally and intellectually stimulating ways", the instructor used half of the lecture time as a social gathering to alleviate student anxiety and increase interaction (Smith & MacGregor, 2000, p. 77). The paragraphs written collaboratively by the four members of the group were shared via the message box of a multimedia tool used by all departments in the campus, Ninova. Reading five paragraphs shared without names, the students were asked to briefly restate what they had read and find common points in the lines. They shared the view that perceptions about race were all subjective and imposed ideologically by power mechanisms in society. The emphasis of students on power dynamics was highly important since the instructor had planned to introduce the students with the notion of postcolonial ecocriticism. The same groups were kept and the instructor asked the students what concepts they could think of when they heard postcolonial ecocriticism. A concept map was used and groups wrote down words they associated with this new concept. Since postcolonial ecocriticism refers to the second wave Ecocriticism of the 21st century, it is quite recent and unknown concept for many readers of literature. Therefore, using a concept map helps familiarize the subject and forms links with the previously discussed theory. Students wrote words that revealed the parallelism between postcolonial and ecocritical literary theories: exploitation, suppression, dominance, and hierarchy.

The illustrations by Karen Barbour in this picturebook are quite minimalistic. There are just a boy who is growing on every page and the tree, which is portrayed as his childhood friend at the outset. Previous discussions about the effect of iconic representations in picturebooks were remembered in class and students found parallelisms between the roots of trees and people's roots in their homelands. Reading personal histories as stories of racial exploitation is the main concern of postcolonial literature. Reading these stories as exploitation of one's homeland with its animal and plant species; however, complicates the issue and makes the subject less human-centered. The emphasis of students in the concept map on hierarchy and exploitation was elaborated by the instructor to underline the fact that forceful exploitation of one's land results

in the displacement of not only people but also non-human beings. Different from the design of the previous lectures, the instructor asked the formal groups to do research on postcolonial ecocriticism until the following week and come up with ideas about which books/stories/films could be analyzed with both postcolonial and ecocritical concerns. The suggestions were collected under the title of “suggested reading list”, which gave the students a chance to design the syllabus of the following term. Among the books, stories and films suggested by students, Arundhati Roy’s *The God of Small Things* (1997) was suggested by three groups, which is not surprising considering that the Turkish translation of the novel had long been in the best sellers list. Students underlined the environmental dimension of the text as it documents devastation and exploitation as a direct consequence of colonialism. Among the films suggested, *Okja* (2017) by Bong Joon-Ho was suggested by two groups as an example of dystopic movie demonstrating the horrors of meat industry. Moreover, the students emphasized animal exploitation as not different from land degradation.

4.5. *The Day Boy and the Night Girl* (MacDonald, 1882)

Believing in “the perfection of humankind” through “compassion for other human beings and nature”, Scottish writer George MacDonald wrote *The Day Boy and the Night Girl* (1882) as a modern fairy tale about the harmonious existence of people and Nature. The story was analyzed

The story was analyzed towards the end of the term after sufficient analysis of classical fairy tales with a new emphasis on the ecocritical elements they include. Previous discussions of fairy tales made students realize that natural settings such as forests, riverside or countryside could also be considered as characters in the narration.

towards the end of the term after sufficient analysis of classical fairy tales with a new emphasis on the ecocritical elements they include. Previous discussions of fairy tales made students realize that natural settings such as forests, riverside or countryside could also be considered as characters in the narration. It was also suggested during class discussions that the quest motif in fairy tales, which generally involves the heroine to face and then overcome the obstacles

on her way with the help of others, can also be accepted as a quest for identity. What is important at this point is to realize that Nature acts as a facilitator or even a partner accompanying the journey of the protagonist and helping her identify with herself. Furthermore, the long-held dualisms between animals and people are challenged, the former being now regarded also as the main characters of the narrative. Just after the long lecture on Angela Carter’s wolf trilogy in her well-known book *The Bloody Chamber* (1979) and discussions on the

reasons why so many classical fairy tales have been rewritten recently, MacDonald's 19th century fairy tale reintroduced the notions of harmony, coexistence, and unity in a relatively classical text.

The instructor opened the discussion by asking the major themes students had found while reading the tale in order to understand whether they had read it with a similar concern. Listing other themes like empathy, symbiosis, and peace as well, the responses of the students demonstrated that they had read the tale as a story of friendship rather than a quest.

The second warm-up question was designed to evaluate how the title shaped reader expectations. Since the title includes two oppositions – day/night and boy/girl – it was quite probable that the tale was expected to be structured in a conventional way at the end of which there are those rewarded and punished. Presenting a question with two choices in an online poll, the instructor asked students what they had expected when they read the title. 13 students chose “I expected it to be a tale of rivalry/conflict between the boy and the girl” whereas only three students chose “I expected it to be a tale of negotiation/harmony between the boy and the girl”. The poll clearly showed that the title had a significant impact on reader expectations. The fact that three students had expected the tale to be a tale of harmony revealed that the act of reading was also influenced by previous knowledge of the reader about the genre, the writer and the time period. The students stated that they had made research about George MacDonald before they started reading the tale and found out that the writer wrote mostly about people's harmonious coexistence with Nature. This in-class discussion about the impact of the title on reader expectations of a text revealed that prior research or readings had a larger impact on how a title was received.

Analysis of Macdonald's tale ended with a written in-class activity which required the students to analyze the ecocritical aspect of the text. The one-paragraph responses of the students were collected and evaluated by the instructor in order to give them written personal feedback. Since it was just two weeks before the final exam and the last story discussed in the class, the instructor tried to make students have an insight regarding the exam structure and question types.

5. Conclusion

In 2022 Fall, the elective 'Short Stories' course focused on ecocritical criticism and the Anthropocene. Students read both classical fairy tales and modern short stories as well as a number of secondary sources that helped enrich the discussions in class. Since the course was

designed with a particular emphasis on ecological issues, it was important to analyze the reading experiences of students when they were asked to read a text from a certain standpoint. The fact that the Anthropocene, as a concept, was an unfamiliar term among students and their ecological concerns were limited to climate crisis and species extinction were the main challenges of this experience. It was observed that insufficient knowledge of a literary theory and unfamiliarity with basic concepts of a subject hindered in-depth analysis of literary texts, restricting them to plot summary and textual analysis of themes, motifs and writing style. Consequently, detailed explanations of the theory with examples were found of high importance in reading courses designed around a specific subject. Since one of the main aims of the course was to raise awareness about ecological issues and make students reconsider their relationship with Nature, it was necessary to make extra readings and lectures on the meaning of the Anthropocene, the increasing human impact on Earth and concepts such as 'ecocriticism', 'ecofeminism', 'non-human', 'rupture', and 'exploitation'. Even with the integration of theoretical lectures, it was still difficult for many students to express their opinions in class, which entailed additional tools to ease the comprehension of the texts and the discussion process. Formal and informal groups were created in all of the lectures that introduce a new text. Group dynamics facilitated the emergence of various new interpretations and increased interaction in the class. Guided reading questions, which were generally asked after collecting the initial and therefore authentic responses of the students at the beginning of the lectures, fostered active reading as they enabled the readers to reread a given text from another perspective. Comparing their initial responses to the texts with those given after guided after-reading questions, the students also acknowledged that reading a text though the lens of a literary theory was quite different from reading it just to understand what it is about.

It was observed that insufficient knowledge of a literary theory and unfamiliarity with basic concepts of a subject hindered in-depth analysis of literary texts, restricting them to plot summary and textual analysis of themes, motifs and writing style

This study provided the instructor with an insight about the challenges students faced in reading literary texts. Although the style and language of the authors were important factors determining the comprehension of texts, having theoretical information about literary theories and background information about particular issues were observed to play a no less important role. With a purpose to ensure active reading throughout the term, the instructor used teaching tools such as formal/informal groups, prompts and warm-up questions, response papers, guided questions and writing tasks. Student surveys given at the end of the term supported the findings of the instructor in that the students shared their satisfaction with group study in lectures, which

obviously fostered collaborative learning. They also indicated that discussing a literary text in pairs or groups and later as a whole class was an indispensable part of reading process as it allowed new ways of reading and reminds multiple interpretations of the same text by the same reader at different times. It is the shared pleasure of students and the instructor's observations of active reading adopted as a reading strategy that might lead researchers believe that reading literary texts is a fruitful challenge.

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Ideological Engagement in a Colonial Society: A Case Study of Premchand's Children's Literature

Compromiso ideológico en una sociedad colonial: un estudio de caso sobre la literatura infantil de Premchand

Compromís ideològic en una societat colonial: un estudi de cas sobre la literatura infantil de Premchand

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Abstract

This paper highlights the importance of locating ideological engagement in children's literature within a particular historical and socio-cultural context. It focuses on the literary works for children written by the prominent fiction writer of colonial India, Dhanpat Rai (1880-1936), better known as "Premchand". The paper offers a textual and historical analysis of his body of work by situating its subject-matter within the larger context of his views on nationalism and literature, evident in his private correspondence, writing and biography. Premchand was a strong proponent of socially and politically engaged literature. He believed that literature of an unfree country like India should educate and offer advice to its people. This greatly reflected in his children's literature written mainly for male children. He sought to develop their character by teaching them certain values and virtues. The main purpose of his works was character development. This paper argues that the values and virtues that Premchand sought to inculcate in his child readers were laden with a strong patriotic fervour. He sought to advocate national consciousness amongst his readers by instilling in them values of patriotism, self-reliance, bravery, courage and justice. In turn, this would enable them to actively participate in the freedom struggle and hold them in good stead in an independent India of the future. The paper contextualises Premchand's children's literature within the nationalist discourse on childhood prevalent in early-twentieth-century colonial India and explores the relevance of Sutherland's conceptual framework in understanding ideological engagement in Premchand's works.

Key words: children's literature, ideology, nationalism, colonialism, Premchand

Resumen

Este artículo destaca la importancia de situar el compromiso ideológico en la literatura infantil dentro de un contexto histórico y sociocultural específico. Se centra en las obras literarias para niños escritas por el destacado escritor de ficción de la India colonial, Dhanpat Rai (1880-1936), más conocido como "Premchand". El artículo ofrece un análisis textual e histórico de su obra al situar su temática en el contexto más amplio de sus opiniones sobre el nacionalismo y la literatura, evidentes en su correspondencia privada, escritos y biografía. Premchand fue un fuerte defensor de la literatura

comprometida social y políticamente. Creía que la literatura de un país no-libre como la India debería educar y ofrecer consejos a su pueblo. Esto se reflejó ampliamente en su literatura infantil, escrita principalmente para niños varones. Buscaba desarrollar su carácter enseñándoles ciertos valores y virtudes. El propósito principal de sus obras era el desarrollo del carácter. Este documento sostiene que los valores y virtudes que Premchand buscaba inculcar en sus lectores infantiles estaban impregnados de un fuerte fervor patriótico. Buscaba promover la conciencia nacional entre sus lectores inculcándoles valores como el patriotismo, la autosuficiencia, la valentía, el coraje y la justicia. A su vez, esto les permitiría participar activamente en la lucha por la libertad y los prepararía para un futuro India independiente. El artículo contextualiza la literatura infantil de Premchand dentro del discurso nacionalista sobre la infancia prevalente en la India colonial de principios del siglo XX y explora la relevancia del marco conceptual de Sutherland para entender el compromiso ideológico en las obras de Premchand.

Palabras claves: literatura infantil, ideología, nacionalismo, colonialismo, Premchand

Resum

Aquest article destaca la importància de situar el compromís ideològic en la literatura infantil dins d'un context històric i sociocultural particular. Se centra en les obres literàries per a infants escrites pel destacat escriptor de ficció de l'Índia colonial, Dhanpat Rai (1880-1936), més conegut com a "Premchand". L'article ofereix un anàlisi textual i històric de la seua obra en situar la seua temàtica dins del context més ampli de les seues opinions sobre el nacionalisme i la literatura, evidents en la seua correspondència privada, la seua escriptura i la seua biografia. Premchand va ser un fort defensor de la literatura compromesa social i políticament. Creia que la literatura d'un país no-lliure com l'Índia hauria d'educar i oferir consells al seu poble. Això es va reflectir àmpliament en la seua literatura infantil, escrita principalment per a nens mascles. Buscava desenvolupar el seu caràcter ensenyant-los certs valors i virtuts. El propòsit principal de les seues obres era el desenvolupament del caràcter. Aquest document argumenta que els valors i virtuts que Premchand buscava inculcar als seus lectors infants estaven carregats d'un fort fervor patriòtic. Buscava promoure la consciència nacional entre els seus lectors inculcant-los valors com el patriotisme, l'autosuficiència, la valentia, el coratge i la justícia. Això, a la vegada, els permetria participar activament en la lluita per la llibertat i els mantindria en bon estat en una Índia independent del futur. El document contextualitza la literatura infantil de Premchand dins del discurs nacionalista sobre la infantesa prevalent a l'Índia colonial del principi del segle XX i explora la rellevància del marc conceptual de Sutherland per entendre el compromís ideològic a les obres de Premchand.

Paraules clau: literatura infantil, ideologia, nacionalisme, colonialisme, Premchand

1. Introduction

Scholars in the field of children's literature studies have variously identified children's literature as a source of socialisation and enculturation (O' Dell, 1978; Zipes, 1981), emotional socialisation (Frevert et al., 2014) and ideological engagement (Hollindale, 1988; Hunt, 1991; Stephens, 1992; Sutherland, 1985). This line of thought recognises that "literature for children is script coded by adults for the information and internalisation of children which must meet the approbation of adults" (Zipes, 1981, p. 19). It posits that this "script" introduces social and emotional norms, cultural values and political beliefs to child readers and enables them to internalise these norms and values. "Literature, then, is a significant resource that supports collective sociocultural activity, in which the author and other gatekeepers (publishers, parents, librarians and teachers) actively participate in the process of transmitting societal values to the reader" (Bingle, 2018, p. 147). Socialisation, enculturation and ideological engagement through reading children's literature are "socio-historical processes that have many levels of discourse and effect" (Zipes, 1981). It is important to recognise that these processes have socio-cultural nuances which can be fully understood when the text is contextualised within the milieu that it is produced in. This paper seeks to particularly deal with one of these socio-historical processes, namely, ideological engagement in children's literature.

Scholars who have theorised ideology in children's literature have built upon developments in literary theory that recognise "the omnipresence of ideology in all literature, and the impossibility of confining its occurrence to visible surface features of a text" (Hollindale, 1988/1992, p. 23). Sutherland (1985) was the first to engage with this premise. He aptly pointed out the subjective position of the author of the children's text, by arguing that "like other types of literature, works written especially for children are informed and shaped by the authors' respective value systems, their notions of how the world or is ought to be" (p. 143). He thus argued that "books express their authors' personal ideologies (whether consciously or unconsciously, openly or indirectly)" (Idem). Through his theorization, Sutherland laid a "groundwork for future exploration of political ideologies in literature for children" (p. 144). Hollindale further established "the complexity of these issues" (1988/1992, p. 18). Hollindale's intervention is critical since he problematised the debate amongst scholars on whether children's literature should promote ideology at the cost of aesthetic value or reject ideology altogether to uphold its literary and aesthetic value. Instead, he aptly recognised the very categories of 'book' and 'child' as "seductive abstractions" (p. 27). He argued that there is no single universal, theoretical notion of the 'book' and the 'child' because of which the production and reception of children's literature differs across social contexts. "Ideology is an inevitable,

untamable and largely uncontrollable factor in the transaction between books and children, and that it is so because of the multiplicity and diversity of both 'book' and 'child' and of the social world in which each of these seductive abstractions takes a plenitude of individual forms" (p. 27). Hollindale's argument makes it clear that ideology in children's literature can be better understood if the ideological engagement and its reception is placed in its particular context. Thus, this paper seeks to analyse ideological engagement in children's literature in a colonial society through the case study of children's literature produced by prominent fiction writer of colonial North India, Premchand.

Having established that the presence of ideology is an inevitable aspect of children's literature, it is important to enquire into the different ways in which ideology is present in children's literature. The views of Sutherland (1985), Hollindale (1988) and Stephens and McCallum (2011) are relevant in this regard. Though the levels of ideological engagement put forth by each of these scholars have their own conceptual nuances, if I were to conflate these levels, the two broad categorizations would be as follows: The first category is where the ideological engagement by the author is intentional and quite apparent. In the second category, the author and reader are largely unaware of the ideological engagement at work. Here, the author unconsciously re-produces their assumptions about social structures and norms which the reader internalises as a given. These levels of ideological engagement need to be juxtaposed with the argument of John Stephens (1992): "there cannot be a narrative without an ideology" and that "ideology is formulated in and by language, meanings within language are socially determined, and narratives are constructed out of language" (p. 8). He demonstrates this argument through his analysis of different fictional modes such as picture books, historical fiction, fantasy amongst others. He argues that these modes are "special site[s] for ideological effect with a potentially powerful capacity for shaping audience attitudes" (p. 3) because ideology is present in fiction "as an implicit secondary meaning at two levels" (Idem): at the level of significance, whereby the reader derives a larger meaning from the text on account of the "theme, moral, insight into behaviour" (p. 2) offered by the text and at the level of the story, whereby the reader interprets seemingly unreal "narrative sequences and character interrelationships" (Idem) from an intelligible, real-life reference point. "There is a considerable conceptual distance" (Hollindale, 1988/1992, p. 19) between Stephens' argument regarding the inextricable relationship between language and ideology and the one initiated by Sutherland regarding the political implications of ideology. This "indicates how rapidly interest in this area has developed" (Idem).

2. Historical Background of Premchand's Children's Literature

"Children's Literature is a reflection of the status of childhood in the society that produced it" (Nikolajeva, 2009, p. 15). This premise has been aptly illustrated in Christopher Kelen's analysis of the *Pegmen Tales* written by Australian children's writer Ella McFayden in 1940s-1950s. By contextualising McFayden's work within the political and socio-cultural milieu of the time, Kelen argues that the work "is representative of the Australian psyche of the 40's and 50's, and of attitudes to childhood in Australia, as they were evolving at that time" (2019, p. 180). Thus, as a methodological sidenote, Kelen's study implicitly brings out the importance of studying the discourse on childhood prevalent at the time so that it enables us to understand the overarching trends and concerns of children's literature. Premchand wrote his children's literature in the early twentieth century which was "a period of colonial Indian history that was marked by the rise of nationalist thought and activism" (Nijhawan, 2004, p. 3723). Premchand's children's literature thus needs to be contextualised within what Nijhawan refers to as the "nationalist discourse" (pp. 3723-3725) on childhood. It envisioned "children as the future citizens of a future nation... Children were expected to meet the requirements of a colonial society in transition. They were taught obedience and socialised into their future roles as women and men of an independent nation" (p. 3724). This discourse emerged as a result of contestation with the colonial discourse on childhood. Historian Satadru Sen posits that from the 1850s-1940s, childhood became a rallying point of contestation between colonial administrators and nationalists (2005, p. 2). This contestation unfolded in a "set of experimental and institutional spaces", such as "schools, reformatories, laws, committees of inquiry, [and] children's literature" (2004, p. 1), where the efforts to colonise and decolonise the native child were carried out by the colonial state and nationalists respectively. Supriya Goswami argues that children's literature became a prominent site of contestation of this kind: "Nineteenth century British, Anglo-Indian and early twentieth century Bengali children's literature" (2012, p. 3) established children as active political agents in the colonial and anti-colonial enterprise who were capable of consolidating and challenging colonialism respectively. Thus, Goswami puts forward the "notion of empowered childhoods from both sides" (p. 4), whereby child protagonists in the texts were "shown to exhibit tremendous agency and transformative power over the politically volatile environment of colonial India" (Idem). In turn, this was meant to inspire the child reader to exercise agency in the real world. This paper subscribes to Goswami's concept of "empowered childhoods" (p. 4) to foreground Premchand's assumption of the child reader as an agentic being capable of actively participating in the freedom struggle, which will be explored in the last section.

Having established the context in which Premchand wrote his children's literature, it is important to shed light on the life and works of Premchand. Dhanpat Rai (1880-1936), better known by his pen-name, "Premchand", was one of the most prolific fiction writers of colonial India who wrote in the two most ubiquitous vernacular languages of North India, Urdu and Hindi. "His work has the same historic significance for India as that of Dickens for England, Balzac for France and Tolstoy and Maxim Gorky for Russia" (Gupta, 1991, p. 88). Dhanpat Rai was born on July 11, 1880 in the village of *Lamhi*, on the outskirts of Benaras located in United Provinces in colonial North India (Gopal, 2006). His father, who was a clerk in the postal department, died when Premchand was seventeen years old (Idem). Fraught with financial difficulties, he sought employment as an assistant teacher at a government primary school in 1899 (Idem). From thereon, he began his long stint of employment in various capacities as a government school teacher and official with the education department.

He "oscillated between his profession of writing and that of teaching" (Abidi, 2022, p. 17). In 1908, his first collection of "aggressively patriotic" (Chandra, 1982, p. 603) short stories, *Soz-e-Watan* (Dirge of the Homeland), written in Urdu was published. Deemed as "seditious" by the local colonial authorities, Premchand was forced to "surrender the unsold copies of the book" (Idem) and was strictly instructed to not write without prior permission. Consequently, "Dhanpat Rai, who was till then writing as Nawab Rai, had to adopt the new pen-name of Premchand to circumvent these instructions" (Idem).

A pioneer of "social realism" (Orsini, 2004, p. xiii), Premchand, advocated that "literature is best defined as the criticism of life; whether in the form of an essay, story or poems, the chief function of literature is to present an honest and critical view of life" (Premchand, 1933, as cited in Coppola, 1986, p. 25). In lieu of this, he extensively wrote about social inequalities, injustices and exploitation in his novels and short stories, covering a wide range of issues, such as "widow remarriage, dowry, untouchability, the rich-and-poor divide, the problem of landless labour, the inequalities of the caste system, etc." (Rubin, 2001, as cited in Jalil, 2014, p. 103). He is thus credited with creating "the genre of the serious novel and the serious short story in two languages, Hindi and Urdu" (Rai, 1978, p. 25).

Premchand was an ardent supporter of the Indian freedom struggle and a strong critic of the colonial state. In 1921, he resigned from the post of Deputy Inspector of Schools after twenty years of government service in support of the Non-Cooperation movement (1920-22)¹ against

¹ The Non-Cooperation movement was a political mass struggle against the British government to gain *Swaraj* (Self-Rule). It was led by Indian freedom fighter, Mahatma Gandhi. One of its many programmes was the boycott of government services, government schools and colleges, law courts, legislative

the British Government led by Gandhi (Gopal, 2006). From then on, “he intended to devote the rest of his life to serving the nation, not by joining any political movement, but through his literary works” (Ranganathan, 2023). In March 1930, he launched a literary-political weekly magazine titled *Hans* (1930-Present)², aimed at inspiring Indians to mobilise against British rule (Sigi, 2006, p. 53). Towards the end of his life, he lent his support for the Progressive Writers Movement, a literary movement which sought to express the voices of the marginalised: the colonised, peasants and the working class. At its inaugural session in 1936, he delivered an iconic speech on the imminent need to re-invent literature to make it socially and politically relevant. Thus, he “comes packaged with all the right definitions: realist, humanist, secularist, social reformer, politically engaged, etc.” (Orsini, 2004).

Premchand approached the enterprise of writing children's literature from the vantage point of a teacher. Premchand's biographer, Madan Gopal notes: “since [he] was employed as a schoolteacher in different schools for twenty years, he deemed it important to write for children” (2004, p. 1). According to Abidi, “his association with schools and students gave him a unique insight into the world of education” (2022, p. 17) and shaped his understanding of the needs and interests of children. Thus, “Premchand wrote stories for children keeping in mind the psyche of children and the desire to produce suitable literature for them” (p. 2). While scholars of Hindi (Goenka, 2002; Giri, 2020; Ramesh, n.d.) have provided a significant overview of Premchand's children's literature, their works have been largely written from a literary standpoint. This paper, while drawing upon their work, seeks to conduct a textual and historical analysis of Premchand's children's literature.

Before delving into the analysis of Premchand's children's literature, it is important to delineate his views on the purpose of literature in a colonial society. A strong proponent of “purposive literature” (Jalil, 2017), Premchand was of the opinion:

Till the time India is unfree, its art cannot soar to extraordinary heights. This is the reason literature of a free country is different from that of an unfree country. The political and social circumstances of our country demand that we educate our people

councils, government honours and titles. Premchand responded to the call of the Non-Cooperation movement by resigning from his government service.

² *Hans*, from the very outset proved to be a financially unsuccessful venture for Premchand. In 1935, it was handed over to the Bharatiya Sahitya Parishad (Indian Literary Council), which was then under the chairmanship of Gandhi. *Hans* became defunct in early 1950s due to financial constraints. In 1986, it was revived under the editorship of the noted Hindi writer, Rajeev Yadav. It continues to be published till date.

wherever the opportunity arises. The stronger the emotions, the more didactic the writing will be (Gopal, 1967, p. 187).

Thus, Premchand implied that literature of an unfree country like India should educate and offer advice to its people. It cannot afford to be merely aesthetically pleasing. In lieu of such ideas, Premchand wrote many patriotic narratives where he gave a “clear call” to “plunge without any reservations into the freedom struggle” (Chandra, 2006, p. 619). Chandra traces shifts in the trajectory of national consciousness expressed and espoused in his short stories: beginning from an “elemental urge for freedom” (p. 603) expressed in *Soz-e-Watan* (Dirge of the Homeland) in 1908 to “pointedly anti-imperialistic” (p. 604) narratives written during “the midst of the Non-Cooperation movement” (Idem) which reflected a more nuanced understanding of “what it meant in actual life to be under foreign subjugation” (Idem). The nature of national consciousness expressed in his writings has been subject to considerable debate on grounds of his recognition and critique of the vicissitudes of the Indian freedom struggle and the inherent class inequalities that lay at the very roots of its inception (Chandra, 2006). Engaging with this debate is beyond the scope of this paper. What is relevant to note here is that one of the important rallying points of Premchand’s literature was to awaken patriotism, raise national consciousness amongst his readers and mobilise them to actively participate in the freedom struggle.

Taking cue from his views on the purpose of literature in a colonial society, this paper seeks to argue that Premchand sought to develop the character of his child readers by teaching them certain values and virtues. These values and virtues were laden with a strong patriotic fervour. Premchand thus sought to advocate national consciousness through his children’s literature by inculcating in his predominantly male child readers values of patriotism, self-reliance, bravery, courage and justice. This would enable them to actively participate in the freedom struggle and would hold them in good stead in an independent India of the future.

3. Methodology

The paper makes use of Sutherland’s conceptual framework to foreground ideological engagement in Premchand’s children’s literature. It establishes the relevance of the concept of “politics of advocacy” (1985, pp. 145-147) put forth by Sutherland in understanding Premchand’s attempt to raise national consciousness through his children’s literature. The paper subscribes to Goswami’s concept of “empowered childhoods” (2012, p. 4) to foreground

Premchand's assumption of the male child reader as an agentic being capable of actively participating in the freedom struggle. I have conducted a textual and historical analysis of Premchand's children's literature by contextualising its subject matter within his views on nationalism and literature, evident in his private correspondence, writing and biography. Thus I have utilised a wide range of sources to illustrate how Premchand utilised children's literature as a source of ideological engagement in a colonial society.

4. Analysis

Children's literature written by Premchand had a strong "educational component" (Mínguez-López, 2014, p. 28). This can be attributed to two factors: his vantage point as a schoolteacher, and the inherent nature of children's literature at large. "Literature for young readers is related to education at two different levels: the general education of children through literature, on the one hand, and literary education, on the other" (Mínguez-López, pp. 29-30). This means that, at the level of general education, literature has the potential to be utilised as a pedagogical tool, aiding the process of learning and, at the level of literary education, children's literature can be utilised as a means to foster literary competence amongst children. Mínguez argues that literary competence is based on the following three elements: the ability to decode meanings in a text and coherently interpret it at large, acquire a wide range of knowledge: "encyclopaedic knowledge, historical and genre knowledge and knowledge of literary conventions" (p. 37) and most importantly develop an attitude which fosters interest in and enjoyment of reading.

4.1. Overview of Premchand's Children's Literature

Premchand wrote many narratives where he featured child protagonists and characters and delved into their inner worlds. However, the literature he wrote specifically for a child audience is limited. The paper thus restricts its scope to the texts that Premchand wrote for children, brief details of which have been provided in the table below. Since majority of these texts will be explored in a later section, it is sufficient to mention here that *Kutte ki Kahani* and *Jungle ki Kahaniyañ* fall in the category of fiction, *Mahatma Sa'adi*, *Ram-charcha*, *Durgadas* and *Bākamaloñ ke Darshan* qualify as biographies.

Title of Work	Theme	Year of Publication
Mahatma Sheikh Sa'adi [The Great Sheikh Sa'adi]	Life-story and works of the Persian literary scholar, Sheikh Sa'di (1210-1291)	1917
Ram-charcha [Discussing Ram]	Simplified version of the Ramayana, an ancient epic of religious importance in Hinduism	Urdu (1928), Hindi (1938)
Durgadas	Historical account of the Rajput resistance against the Mughals spearheaded by Durgadas Rathore (1638-1718) ³	1936
Jungle ki Kahaniyan [Stories of the Jungle]	Collection of short stories rooted in the wild	1936
Kutte ki Kahani [The Story of a Dog]	Autobiographical narrative of a dog	1936
Bākamalon ke Darshan [View of the Greats]: Two Parts	Collection of biographies of historical personalities	Urdu (1929), Hindi (1940)

The characters and personalities featured in Premchand's children's literature as well as his intended audience were predominantly male. *Ram-charcha*, *Kutte ki Kahani* and *Durgadas* were directly addressed to male child readers. *Bākamalon ke Darshan* [View of the Greats] solely featured male historical personalities. There seems to be a disjuncture between Premchand's literature for adults and children when it comes to female representation and writing for a female audience. In the literature written for adults, "Premchand makes women a focus of enquiry, a subject of the story, an agent of the narrative" (Gupta, 1991, p. 89) and deals with issues of their oppression and autonomy (Vanita, 2008). Such a concern does not translate into his children's literature. The reason why Premchand did not write for a female audience can be partly explained by his recognition of relatively low female literacy rates at the time. In his article, *Sanyukt Prānt mein Shiksha ka Prachār* (Promotion of Education in United Provinces), dated May 1933, Premchand citing data pertaining to education from the Census of 1931, noted that the female literacy rate in India was 10 % per mile when the male literacy rate was 80% per mile (1933/2022, pp. 79-80). He remarked that "though there [was] commendable progress in the last decade, when compared to other nations, it [was] still less" (Idem). However, this does not discount the fact that Premchand was largely concerned with instilling love for the nation amongst boys as well as their upbringing, as evident in his Preface to *Durgadas* and his essay, *Bacchon ko Svadheen banao* [Make Children Self-Reliant] respectively, both of which will be discussed later. This can be read as a limitation of Premchand's children's literature. However,

³ The Rajputs were a regional warrior class and land-owning elite that wielded power in North-Western India. They were organised into various clans and kingdoms. They were often at loggerheads with the Mughal dynasty that ruled over large parts of South Asia from the early sixteenth century to the mid-nineteenth century. Their conflict emanated from the territorial expansion of the Mughals. Durgadas Rathore, a member of the Rathore clan, was the General of the kingdom of Marwar. He led the resistance against the Mughal Emperor, Aurangzeb who sought to annex Marwar.

this should be considered a tentative critique since the issue is subject to further historical enquiry.

Premchand took to writing literature for children at a time when children's literature had become a commercially viable venture. In a private correspondence dated 27th May, 1933, Premchand cited his agent who informed him that "the demand for children's books and textual content for schools was quite high" (Gopal, 1967, p. 259).⁴ This indicates that children's literature had a substantive audience at the time. Though it is difficult to ascertain the exact demographic share of the readership of Premchand's children's literature, it might have consisted of school children who could read independently, parents who read out the texts to children as well as school teachers who engaged with the text in a classroom setting (applicable in the case of *Sheikh Sa'adi*). Based on this, it can be argued that the access of Premchand's children's literature was limited to children from the middle and upper class families who had access to formal education and could afford to buy these books for educational and recreational purposes.

4.2. Character Development: Premise of Premchand's Children's Literature

Premchand was also closely involved in the preparation of textbooks. Mahatma Sheikh Sa'di [The Great Sheikh Sa'adi] was circulated as a textbook since Abhay Pratap, the editor of a much later edition of the text tells us that the first edition "was rewarded by the United Provinces Textbook Committee" (2000, p. 9). Qasmi (2016) informs us that textbook committees set up by the colonial government initially prepared and published textbooks. However, with increased demand, private firms were contracted who then sought local intelligentsia in preparing textbooks according to guidelines given by the education department (pp. 230-231). These books were then submitted for approval to the committees, which recommended three options for school headmasters to choose from (Idem).

Textbooks written by Premchand belonged to the latter category, where his works were submitted to the Textbook Committee for approval. For instance, in a private correspondence, dated October 25th, 1932, Premchand stated that he had submitted *Bākamaloṅ ke Darshan* [View of the Greats] to the Textbook Committee but it was rejected (Gopal, 1967, p. 244). He speculated that it might have been rejected on grounds of lack of representation of Muslim personalities and further noted that after having made the relevant addition, he was hopeful

⁴ That Premchand took cognizance of this can be gauged from the fact that the Hindi edition of *Ram-charcha* [Discussing Ram] and *Kutte ki Kahani* [Story of a Dog] were published by his own publishing firm called Saraswati Press.

that it would be approved by the committee and would be thus included in the school syllabus (Idem).

In addition to the Textbook Committee, publishers also influenced the content of textbooks. In

In fact, the major premise of Premchand's children's literature was to develop the character of his child readers by teaching them certain values and virtues. Thus, character development was the main purpose of Premchand's children's literature.

a private correspondence, Premchand discusses a compilation of stories in Hindi edited by him, known as *Galp Samuchay* (Gopal, 1967, p. 189). He notes that he did not have the liberty to select the writers since they were selected by the publisher. He further writes: "Stories written in a difficult language and reflecting mature content were not needed for school [students]. Concern with character should be the most important in this field" (Gopal, 1967, p. 189). This statement directs our attention to two important points pertaining to children's literature at large and Premchand's pedagogical agenda

respectively; first, to the fact that the involvement of a wide range of stakeholders in the production and/or circulation of children's literature, such as editors, publishers, educational institutions, writers lead to the multiplicity of educational messages conveyed through children's literature (Mínguez-López, 2014, p. 30). Secondly, to Premchand's pedagogical concerns which were centred on character development.

This can be illustrated by means of an example. In the introduction to his story, *Kutte ki Kahani* [Story of a Dog] which presents an autobiographical narrative of a dog, Premchand writes:

Boys! You must have heard a lot of stories about kings and bravehearts; however, you must not have heard a dog's life story. You would wonder whether anything worth hearing about ever happens in a dog's life. He does not fight with gods, nor does he go into the world of fairies, nor does he win great battles. Thus, I fear that you might throw this story away. However, I reassure you that events that never happen in the lives of even the greatest of men have happened in my life. Thus, I now embark to narrate my story. Do not ignore my story the way you often reprimand dogs. You will learn a lot of useful values here and good values should always be acquired wherever the opportunity arises (1936, p. 2)

Thus, here Premchand implicitly espoused literature as a medium of teaching "good values" to children and thus building their character.

4.3. Ideological Engagement in Premchand's Children's Literature

In this section, I shall analyse how Premchand sought to inculcate national consciousness through his children's texts, namely *Durgadas*, *Ram-charcha* [Discussing Ram], *Bākamaloṅ ke Darshan* [View of the Greats], which are biographies and *Kutte ki Kahani* [Story of a Dog] which is a story. In *Durgadas*, Premchand provides a historical account of the Rajput resistance against the Mughals spearheaded by Durgadas Rathore (1638-1718), the General of the kingdom of *Marwar*. In the Preface to the text, Premchand hails Durgadas as the epitome of "self-sacrifice, selfless sense of service and glorious character" (Premchand, 1936/2004, p. 574). He writes: "No other form of literature can ever be as useful for young boys as the life stories of the sons of the nation. These stories not only strengthen their character but also instil in them love for the nation and courage" (Idem).

Driven by a similar spirit, *Bākamaloṅ ke Darshan* [View of the Greats] is a collection of biographies of the following historical personalities:

- Rana Pratap (1540-1597): Ruler of Rajput kingdom of *Mewar*
- Man Singh (1550-1614): Ruler of Rajput kingdom of *Amber* and general of the Mughal army
- Ranjit Singh (1780 –1839): Founder and ruler of the Sikh state in Punjab
- Badruddin Tyabji (1844 – 1906): Lawyer and political activist of the Indian freedom struggle
- Gopalkrishna Gokhale (1866-1915): Political activist of the Indian freedom struggle
- Sayyid Ahmad Khan (1817-1898) : Socio-religious reformer and educationist
- Ramakrishna Bhandarkar (1837-1925): Scholar-reformer and educationist
- Swami Vivekananda (1863-1902): Socio-religious reformer and philosopher
- Rana Jang Bahadur (1817-1877) : Ruler of Nepal
- Joshua Reynolds (1723-1792): English painter
- Garibaldi (1807-1882): Italian revolutionary

Though these personalities belong to different time periods in Indian as well as world history, a common theme explored in most of these biographies (except the biographies of Reynolds and Sayyid Ahmad Khan) is the selfless love these 'greats' had for their homeland. These biographies glorify the courage, bravery and spirit of sacrifice the personalities exhibited in resisting and challenging foreign rule in their respective contexts either through direct confrontation or through intellectual and political pursuits. These personalities are depicted as role models for

children to emulate. Through this collection, Premchand sought to awaken consciousness and desire for freedom amongst child readers (Giri, 2022, p. 15).

Establishing the importance of freedom seems to be one of the premises of another children's text by Premchand, *Kutte ki Kahani* [Story of a Dog] (1936). Premchand presents an autobiographical narrative of the courageous and relentlessly loyal dog named *Kallu* [Blacky] who narrates 'his' eventful life story replete with adventure, drama and social satire. The narrative swiftly traverses through different encounters and landscapes experienced and inhabited by *Kallu* respectively: starting with a description of his family life in a village, moving onto his increased closeness with his first master, *Pandit ji* on account of the lengths he goes to protect his family and wealth, followed by his adoption by a *sahab* (most likely a British official) who invests in his care and whose life *Kallu* saves on multiple occasions. In the end of the story, though *Kallu* is rewarded for his outstanding bravery and loyalty towards his master in the form of "immense love and respect from people around him and is even treated like a deity" (Premchand, 1936, p. 95), he yearns for his freedom despite all the care and affection he receives: "All this respect and honour has started to annoy me now. It is no less than a prison for me. My heart yearns for the time I could roam around freely" (p. 98). Thus, Premchand sought to assert the importance of freedom to his child readers.

Through his literature, Premchand also sought to implicitly make child readers aware of the state of India's lack of freedom under colonial control. *Ram-charcha* [Discussing Ram] (1938), a simplified version of the 'Ramayana' for children is a case in point. While describing the ideal, just and prosperous reign of King *Dashrath* (*Ram's* father), Premchand strikes a contrast between the contemporary colonial milieu and a mythical past: "Unlike the courts of today, no false lawsuits were filed back then" (p. 5). Thus, according to Premchand, tenets of justice were disregarded in the contemporary colonial rule. His emphatic description of *Ram Rajya* (the reign of Ram) and its espousal of the values of justice and equality can also be understood within this context: "*Ayodhya* progressed to such an extent under the rule of Ram and the people were so happy with Ram's rule that the term *Ram Rajya* [Ram's Reign] became a popular phrase such that it is now used to denote a particular time period" (p. 175). As Giri argues, "the structure of *Ram-charcha* and the selection of essays can be contextualised within the needs and understanding of the time that Premchand was living in" (2022, p. 17). "Like other writers,

He sought to instil in children values of patriotism, self-reliance, bravery, courage and justice which would enable them to actively participate in the freedom struggle and would hold them in good stead in an independent India of the future.

authors of children's books are inescapably influenced by their views and assumptions when selecting what goes into the work and (what does not)" (Sutherland, 1985, p. 144). Thus, Premchand's perception and critique of the contemporary colonial milieu made its way into the literature he wrote for children. Analysis of the aforementioned texts indicates that Premchand had a discernible intention of inculcating national consciousness amongst his readers through his children's literature in order to inspire them towards the cause of the ongoing freedom struggle.

4.4. The 'Politics of Advocacy' in Premchand's Children's Literature

This section explores the relevance of Sutherland's conceptual framework in understanding ideological engagement in Premchand's children's literature. The central premise of Sutherland's framework is that children's books act as "purveyors of [the author's] politics (1985, p. 144). A children's book is inherently imbued with the ideology of the author either consciously or unconsciously, as a consequence of which it promulgates the author's values (pp. 143-144). The very act of publishing such a work in a society which is already ideologically charged constitutes "a political act" (p. 143). Sutherland argues that there are three ways in which ideologies are expressed in children's literature: "the politics of advocacy, the politics of attack and the politics of assent" (p. 145):

The politics of advocacy "seeks to persuade readers of its ideology; to promote the authors' world views and notions of what is or ought to be; to influence readers' thinking, feeling, and behaviour" (p. 147). The politics of attack directs attack against social attitudes, institutions, practices and beliefs, "world views and value systems" (p. 147) that are against the author's perception of "right and wrong, good and evil, justice, fair play, decency or truth" (p. 147). The politics of assent "is an author's passive, unquestioning acceptance and internalisation of an established ideology, which is then transmitted in the author's writing in an unconscious manner" (p. 157)

Sutherland's framework highlights the political aspect of ideology. Significant time has elapsed since Sutherland first put forth his framework. Since then, scholars such as Hollindale have argued that ideology is not just a "political policy" but a "climate of belief" (p. 37), whereby the author's ideology is greatly shaped by the common perceptions and way of thinking prevalent in the world inhabited by the author. Despite these advancements in understanding, this paper argues for the relevance of Sutherland's framework in providing a suitable lens for analysing the politically charged historical context in which Premchand was writing. The political struggle for India's independence was at a peak and Premchand was strongly influenced by it. In 1921, he

resigned from government service in support of Gandhi's Non-Cooperation movement and decided to devote his literary endeavours for the service of the nation (Ranganathan, 2023). Besides, his views on literature were imbued with a political tone.

It is on this ground that Sutherland's framework has been utilised to engage with Premchand's ideological engagement in his children's literature, which shall be discussed hereon.

According to Sutherland, "the politics of advocacy seeks to persuade readers of its ideology; to

Premchand believed that literature in a colonial society ought to have a social and political purpose of educating its citizens, by virtue of which it might not have great aesthetic value. Thus, he implied that literature in such a society would inevitably be ideological, considering the state of lack of freedom its people were in.

promote the authors' world views and notions of what is or ought to be; to influence readers' thinking, feeling, and behaviour" (p. 147). This means the author directly advocates a particular ideology that they seek to consciously inculcate amongst child readers. Firstly, that Premchand sought to consciously inculcate patriotism in his readers is evident from his Preface to *Durgadas* where he establishes the importance of introducing male readers to stories of 'national heroes' which facilitates character development and instils love for their homeland. Secondly, Sutherland's argument that

the politics of advocacy "frequently sets up attractive role models for the young, inducing admiration, and extolling certain values as virtues" (1985, p. 146) seems applicable to Premchand's text, *Bākamaloṅ ke Darshan* [View of the Greats], a collection of inspirational biographies of great men which highlights and glorifies the values of patriotism, self-sacrifice, courage and bravery embodied by these men. Thirdly, the politics of advocacy "promote the authors' world views and notions of what is or ought to be" (p. 147). This is evident in *Ram-charcha* [Discussing Ram], the narrative and content of which is shaped by Premchand's perception of the contemporary colonial milieu and his critique of it. It is important to note that the politics of advocacy is relatively prominent in Premchand's biographies as compared to his stories. The texts mentioned here are all biographies. This can be related to the inherent nature of the genre. Sutherland, illustrating the ideological nature of biographies, points out: "Biographies of famous people tend to simplify, or adulate or indoctrinate" (1985, p. 144).

On the other hand, children's stories written by Premchand align more with the "politics of attack," posited by Sutherland. The "politics of attack" directs attack against social attitudes, institutions, practices and beliefs, "world views and value systems" which are against the author's perception of "right and wrong, good and evil, justice, fair play, decency or truth" (p.

147). For instance, in his story, *Kutte ki Kahani* [Story of a Dog], Premchand calls out the hollowness and hypocrisy of caste inequalities prevalent in India in a specific subplot. Thus, Premchand's attempt to advocate national consciousness and instil patriotism in child readers through the "politics of advocacy" needs to be juxtaposed with his attempt to make children aware of social issues prevalent within their society through the "politics of attack." Thus, genre seems to be a major factor determining the level of ideological engagement in Premchand's children's literature. Nevertheless, this paper argues that the "politics of advocacy" is a prominent feature of his children's literature, whereby he sought to advocate national consciousness amongst children. This argument can be substantiated by examining non-fiction written by Premchand which according to Abidi (2022), "carries the quintessence of his ideology" (p. 15).

One such non-fiction piece is an essay titled *Bacchon ko Svadheen banao* [Make Children Self-Reliant], published in his magazine *Hans* [Swan] in April 1930, where he openly expresses his views on the education and upbringing of children. Addressing the essay to parents, he asserted the need for them to enable their young boys to become self-reliant. According to him, being self-reliant meant being self-disciplined so that they could distinguish between right and wrong on the basis of their discretion and be capable of protecting themselves, independent of parental supervision.

He opined:

Children should be taught to become self-reliant. In the past, when obeying and respecting elders was the most sought after rule and every low caste bowed down in respect to the upper caste, then it was appropriate to teach boys right from their childhood to respect their elders. However, to teach the boys of today to obey the orders of an external power is to turn a blind eye to the greatest need of boys. Considering the situation that the youth is facing today, the need of the hour is independence of thoughts and actions rather than etiquette and courtesy...The objective of the boy's life is to find employment, rather than obeying orders. In reality, the boy who blindly obeys his parents' orders lacks self-confidence. He always waits for someone or the other to give orders (Premchand, 1930, pp. 15-16)

By stating that boys should not blindly obey the orders of their parents nor an external power, he made the case for boys to act independently and think for themselves in two spheres: the domestic and the political. While the former is directly evident since the essay is directly addressed to parents, the latter is more implicit. It can be argued that Premchand was alluding

to the colonial government through his usage of the term, external power. This can be understood by contextualising the political ideology of the magazine *Hans* [Swan] which was aimed at inspiring Indians to mobilise against British rule (Sigi, 2006, p. 53). It is in this context that the patriotic undertone behind his plea against teaching boys to obey the orders of an external power should be understood. He further argued that:

Children of rich, indulgent families, steeped in luxury who were dependent on their servants for every small chore or errand and had every facility for travel and entertainment at their disposal had the tendency to harm their brothers at the cost of their self-interest and become government sycophants (Premchand, 1930, p. 17)

Though it cannot be said with certainty that Premchand was hinting at one's 'countrymen' through use of the term 'brothers', it can be sufficiently argued that Premchand's attempt to raise national consciousness amongst male children went hand in hand with his appeal to their parents of enabling them to become self-reliant by steering them away from becoming subservient to the colonial state.

The implicit assumption behind Premchand's appeal to enable young boys to become self-reliant was that they were agentic beings who should be encouraged to exercise their discretion and realise their potential. This reflects in his aforementioned works. He seeks to awaken patriotism amongst his readers through his text, *Durgadas*. In *Bākamaloṅ ke Darshan* [View of the Greats], he presents role models for children to emulate. Through *Ram-charcha* [Discussing Ram], he seeks to make his readers aware of the state of India's unfreedom under colonial control. In *Kutte ki Kahani* [Story of a Dog], he inspires his readers towards the cause of freedom by establishing its importance. These texts seem to be governed by the common assumption that children had the potential of supporting the cause of freedom and participating in the freedom struggle. Thus, Premchand's children's texts can be placed under the category of "British, Anglo-Indian, and Bengali children's literature of empire" which "not only engage in political activism, but also seek to empower children (both real and fictional) by celebrating them as active colonial and anti-colonial agents" (Goswami, p. 3). Thus, Supriya Goswami's concept of "empowered childhoods" (2012, p. 4) is useful in foregrounding Premchand's assumption of male children agentic beings capable of actively participating in the freedom struggle.

5. Conclusion

While a wide range of scholars have substantively theorised ideological engagement in children's literature, it is important to acknowledge it as a "socio-historical process" (Zipes, 1981), the nuances of which can be fully understood only when it is placed in its specific context. Thus, this paper highlights the importance of locating ideological engagement in children's literature within a particular historical and socio-cultural context. It is based on Hollindale's premise that ideology is an inevitable and unavoidable factor in the interaction between books and children because of the multiplicity and diversity of both 'book' and 'child' and of the social world inhabited by them (1988/1992, p. 27). Taking this argument into consideration, this paper has sought to analyse ideological engagement in children's literature in a colonial society through the case study of children's literature written by Premchand. His children's literature enables us to understand how an author with strong views on colonialism creatively utilised literature as a medium to channel and propagate his ideology amongst his child readers.

Premchand was a strong proponent of "purposive literature" (Jalil, 2017) i.e. literature written with the purpose of bringing about social change. He was of the opinion that literature of an unfree country like India should educate and offer advice to its people. This greatly reflected in his literary texts written for children (predominantly male) through which he sought to develop their character by teaching them certain values and virtues. The main purpose of Premchand's children's literature was character development. The values and virtues that Premchand sought to inculcate in his child readers were laden with a strong patriotic fervour. He sought to advocate national consciousness through his children's literature by instilling in his readers values of patriotism, self-reliance, bravery, courage and justice which would enable them to actively participate in the freedom struggle and would hold them in good stead in an independent India of the future. His emphasis on these values needs to be contextualised within the "nationalist discourse" (Nijhawan, 2004, pp. 3723-3725) on childhood prevalent in early twentieth century colonial India.

The intricacies of ideological engagement in Premchand's children's literature can be effectively understood through Sutherland's conceptual framework on the levels of ideological engagement. The paper has established the relevance of the concept of the "politics of advocacy" (1985, pp. 145-147) in understanding Premchand's attempt to advocate national consciousness through his children's literature. The politics of advocacy is evident in Premchand's biographies for children, namely *Durgadas*, *Bākamaloṅ ke Darshan* [View of the Greats] and *Ram-charcha* [Discussing Ram], where he seeks to inculcate patriotism in boys,

present role models of men dedicated to the cause of freedom and make his readers aware of the lack of freedom under colonial control respectively. This argument can be substantiated by reading his children's texts along with his essay titled 'Make Children Self-Reliant' which can be referred to as an ideological declaration of sorts. Here, amongst other exhortations, he urges parents to enable their male children to become self-reliant by steering them away from becoming subservient to the colonial state. Having stated this, it is also important to acknowledge that genre is a major factor determining the level of ideological engagement in Premchand's children's literature. While Premchand's biographies align with Sutherland's concept of the "politics of advocacy," his children's stories gravitate more towards the "politics of attack," whereby he cast an implicit critique on social inequalities prevalent within Indian society.

It is important to note that Premchand's children's literature should not be read in isolation. Rather, it should be juxtaposed with the literature that he wrote for adults on two grounds; firstly, a comparative analysis will facilitate understanding differences, "correlations and similarities" of "values, attitudes, and assumptions" (Sutherland, 1985, p. 156) conveyed in the two bodies of work. This will contribute towards acquiring a comprehensive view of ideological engagement in Premchand's literature at large. Secondly, though this paper has restricted its scope to texts written for children, analysing adult writings written by Premchand that featured child characters, their inner worlds and their relationships with the family and society at large will help gain a layered understanding of Premchand's views on childhood, upbringing and socialisation of children.

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Ανάγνωση και Χώρος: Αποκαλύπτοντας Δυναμικές Αλληλεπιδράσεις

Reading and Space: Unveiling Dynamic Interactions

Lectura y espacio: revelando interacciones dinámicas

Lectura i espai: revelant interaccions dinàmiques

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Abstract

This article explores the ways in which of Greek urban middle-class individuals defined as readers engage with and navigate social and cultural spaces, emphasizing the agency and creativity in their reading practices. The study adopts an ethnographic approach. Data were collected through in-depth interviews followed by thematic analysis. The study focuses specifically on the role of physical and spatial contexts in shaping reading experiences and practices, paying attention to meanings of reading that are often overlooked. It penetrates the private sphere and analyzes readings that take place in a "safe" space, contrasting with the shared readings that occur in the public sphere. The analysis highlights how the environment and the characteristics of specific places such can influence and shape reading experiences as embodied acts. At the same time, the analysis illuminates the readers' agency in relation to reading practices, while offering an analytical record of subjective and experiential dimension of reading.

Key words: embodied reading, reading practices, reading places, reading agency, ethnographic approach.

Resumen

Este artículo explora las formas en que los individuos griegos de clase media urbana definidos como lectores se involucran y navegan en espacios sociales y culturales, enfatizando la agencia y la creatividad en sus prácticas de lectura. El estudio adopta un enfoque etnográfico. Los datos fueron recolectados a través de entrevistas en profundidad seguidas de análisis temático. El estudio se centra específicamente en el papel de los contextos físicos y espaciales en la configuración de las experiencias y prácticas de lectura, prestando atención a los significados de la lectura que a menudo se pasan por alto. Penetra en la esfera íntima y analiza las lecturas que se dan en un espacio "seguro", contrastándolas con las lecturas compartidas que se dan en la esfera pública. El análisis destaca cómo el entorno y las características de lugares específicos pueden influir y dar forma a las experiencias de lectura como actos encarnados. Al mismo tiempo, el análisis ilumina la agencia de los lectores en relación con las prácticas de lectura, al tiempo que ofrece un registro analítico de la dimensión subjetiva y experiencial de la lectura.

Palabras clave: lectura encarnada, prácticas de lectura, lugares de lectura, agencia de lectura, enfoque etnográfico.

Resum

Aquest article explora les maneres en què els individus de classe mitjana urbana grega, definits com a lectors, es relacionen i naveguen pels espais socials i culturals, posant èmfasi en l'agència i la creativitat en les seues pràctiques lectores. L'estudi adopta un enfocament etnogràfic. Les dades es van recollir mitjançant entrevistes en profunditat seguides d'anàlisi temàtica. L'estudi se centra específicament en el paper dels contextos físics i espacials en la configuració de les experiències i pràctiques lectores, prestant atenció als significats de la lectura que sovint es passen per alt. Penetra en l'àmbit íntim i analitza les lectures que tenen lloc en un espai "segur", contrastant amb les lectures compartides que es donen en l'esfera pública. L'anàlisi posa de manifest com l'entorn i les característiques de llocs concrets poden influir i donar forma a les experiències de lectura com a actes encarnats. Al mateix temps, l'anàlisi il·lumina l'agència dels lectors en relació a les pràctiques lectores, alhora que ofereix un registre analític de la dimensió subjectiva i vivencial de la lectura.

Paraules clau: lectura encarnada, pràctiques lectores, llocs de lectura, agència lectora, enfocament etnogràfic.

Extended abstract

This article delves into the realm of Greek urban middle-class readers and their engagement with social and cultural spaces, shedding light on their agency and creativity within the realm of reading practices. Employing an ethnographic approach, the study aims to explore the multifaceted ways in which these individuals define themselves as readers and navigate the diverse landscapes of literary experiences.

As stated, the study adopts an ethnographic approach, viewing literacy as a social practice (Besnier, 2000). Part 1, explains the reasons behind selecting an ethnographic approach and the methodology employed to conduct the research. In order to capture the rich nuances of this phenomenon, in-depth interviews were conducted. The participants were enlisted through snowball sampling, which is a non-probability sampling technique. In this method the pool of initially-enrolled participants is used to assist on recruiting additional participants who meet the criteria for the study (Goodman 1961). Consequently, the specific criteria were established by the participants themselves, with the primary requirement being someone to identify as a "reader". The interview plan adhered to an unstructured format, devoid of predetermined questions, but centered around thematic areas. The interview's purpose was to gain a deeper understanding of how spaces influence the reading experience as an embodied act. The collected data underwent thematic analysis allowing for a deep understanding of reading practices of twenty-one urban middle-class individuals (from Athens, Thessaloniki and Mytilene) and their significance within their lives.

Part 2, "Spaces and embodied reading: from the private to the public sphere" introduces to key concepts of space. It explains that representations of space are where everyday life is experienced, where subjects place their experiences connecting this idea to the spaces where reading happens today. This section highlights aspects of private reading spaces. The private sphere is often lauded from the participants in this research for its appropriateness as a setting for reading activities. With its inherent lack of sociability and absence of formality, it is regarded as a tranquil and pleasurable environment conducive to engaging in interactive and enjoyable reading experiences.

While Part 2 brings to surface ways that institutionalized spaces affects on their reading experience, Part 3 explores the construction of reading activities within institutionalized spaces, with a particular emphasis on the library as an example. The physical characteristics and layout of the library have a significant impact on how people navigate and behave within its premises, shaping their experiences

and influencing social interactions. The library holds a unique position as a dedicated space for reading, serving as one of the environments where reading is practiced as a synchronous collective activity. By examining the discourse of the readers involved in this study, the research presents an exploration of the challenges posed to dominant readings often promoted by public libraries.

In Part 4, the discussion shifts towards the concept of on-the-go readings. Readers engage in reading activities in various locations, driven by their desire to utilize their free time effectively during the day and to enhance their enjoyment of the reading experience. The urban experience of large cities is vividly portrayed through the perspectives of the readers. It is observed that readers often carry books in their bags, which they either read during their commute on subways or buses or find suitable "reading spots" such as tranquil cafes with soft music or benches in parks, where they open their books and immerse themselves in reading.

The Part 5 that follows, centers on the book buying experience, particularly emphasizing the bookstore as a realm of sensory exploration, described by readers as a "laboratory of aromas and tastes" (Nancy, 2009). This idea reinforces the concept of reading as an embodied act. The research raises the question of whether bookstores are merely commercial spaces or if they can be perceived as havens of reading pleasure. Indirectly responding to this inquiry, the subjects of the study highlight alternative practices and uses of books as commodities, demonstrating their commitment to reading and the enrichment it brings, beyond mere commercial transactions.

From the previous discussion, it can be seen that through this research, it becomes possible to illuminate the intricate connections between books, readers, and the act of reading within the context of physical spaces. The study sheds light on the profound interplay and relationship between these elements, emphasizing how the spatial environment influences and shapes the reading experience. Often overlooked, the meanings associated with reading in different physical settings provide valuable insights into the readers' engagement with texts. By focusing on the private sphere, characterized by "personal" reading spaces, in contrast to shared readings occurring in public spheres, we gain a nuanced understanding of the ways in which the environment influences and shapes reading experiences as embodied acts.

Through the analysis of these contextual factors, this study not only reveals the impact of the environment on reading experiences, but also illuminates the agency of the readers themselves. The readers' active role in shaping their reading practices becomes evident as they navigate and negotiate the boundaries of social and cultural spaces. Readers, through their agency, actively transform the act of reading into a dynamic and creative process, exerting influence over the meanings and interpretations they derive from the texts they engage with.

Furthermore, this study seeks to provide an analytical record of the subjective and experiential dimensions of reading. By delving into the readers' perspectives, emotions, and personal narratives, we gain a holistic understanding of their reading practices and the significance attached to them. This analytical approach allows us to move beyond a mere exploration of reading habits and preferences, providing insights into the transformative power of reading within the lives of Greek urban middle-class individuals.

In conclusion, this research illuminates the dynamic interplay between readers, texts, and social/cultural environments, emphasizing the agency and creativity exercised by readers in navigating these spaces. Its interdisciplinary findings make valuable contributions to the field of literary studies, while also holding implications for scholars, educators, and policymakers seeking a comprehensive understanding of the multifaceted nature of reading practices and their transformative potential within contemporary society.

1. Εισαγωγή

Η παρούσα μελέτη επιχειρεί να κατανοήσει τις χωρικές διαστάσεις της ανάγνωσης. Με άλλα λόγια, προσπαθεί να «τοποθετήσει» αναγνώσεις στα χωρικά συμφραζόμενά τους. Πού εδράζουν οι αναγνώσεις των σύγχρονων αναγνωστών/τριών; Το ερώτημα αυτό θα μπορούσε να απαντηθεί σχηματικά και άλλες έρευνες ποσοτικής προσέγγισης το έχουν στο παρελθόν επιχειρήσει [βλ. Παπαμιχαήλ και Πατινιώτης (1999)]. Το ότι ένα ποσοστό αναγνωστών διαβάζει για παράδειγμα στις δημόσιες συγκοινωνίες παρέχει μια γενική εικόνα. Τι μας λέει όμως για τους αναγνώστες/τριες σε πιο προσωπικό επίπεδο; Λείπει το στοιχείο μιας προσωπικής μαρτυρίας. Η σύγχρονη έρευνα του Παναγιωτόπουλου (2022) χρησιμοποιώντας ποσοτικά σε συνδυασμό με ποιοτικά στοιχεία καλύπτει σε ένα βαθμό αυτή την έλλειψη. Επαναδιατυπώνει τα βασικά παραδοσιακά ερωτήματα για την ανάγνωση, τα οποία συνδέονται οργανικά με την κατανόηση των κοινωνικών συνθηκών που γεννούν τη φιλαναγνωσία. Παράλληλα επιχειρεί να αναλύσει τους σύνθετους δεσμούς μεταξύ ανάγνωσης, κουλτούρας, κοινωνικών σχέσεων και εξουσίας στη σημερινή ελληνική κοινωνία. Στην ίδια κατεύθυνση, αλλά με καθαρά ποιοτική προσέγγιση, κινείται η παρούσα έρευνα. Υιοθετώντας εθνογραφική προσέγγιση στοχεύει να αναδείξει μέσα από τον λόγο των αναγνωστών/τριών τους χώρους τους οποίους οι ίδιοι/ες επενδύουν με αναγνώσεις και τους λόγους για τους οποίους τους επιλέγουν. Αυτοί μπορεί να είναι χώροι που αναμενόμενα συνδέονται με την ανάγνωση ή χώροι απροσδόκητοι και χώροι ανομολόγητοι από τις συνήθεις έρευνες. Η παρούσα έρευνα στοχεύει να αναδείξει πρακτικές ανάγνωσης και νοηματοδοτήσεις σε σχέση με αυτούς τους χώρους.

Χαρτογραφώντας τους χώρους όπου εδράζει η ανάγνωση, οι αναγνώστες μιλούν έμμεσα ή λιγότερο έμμεσα για την ίδια τη «φύση» της εμπλουτίζοντας τη γνώση σχετικά με το πώς επιτελείται η ανάγνωση και τι συμβαίνει πριν, μετά και κατά τη διάρκειά της. Η μελέτη συχνά μέσα από τον λόγο των αναγνωστών/τριών ακολουθεί αναδρομικά τις διαδρομές των βιβλίων που εντοπίζονται στις προσωπικές συλλογές τους. Υπό αυτό το πρίσμα, ο ιδιωτικός χώρος –ο χώρος της προσωπικής συλλογής βιβλίων– συνδέεται με ήδη τελεσμένες αναγνώσεις στους χώρους που έχουν επιτελεστεί. Οι λόγοι που αναδύονται παρέχουν μία καλύτερη κατανόηση του τρόπου με τον οποίο τα αναγνωστικά περιβάλλοντα είναι αναπόσπαστα με τη δημιουργία νοήματος στην

συλλογής βιβλίων– συνδέεται με ήδη τελεσμένες αναγνώσεις στους χώρους που έχουν επιτελεστεί. Οι λόγοι που αναδύονται παρέχουν μία καλύτερη κατανόηση του τρόπου με τον οποίο τα αναγνωστικά περιβάλλοντα είναι αναπόσπαστα με τη δημιουργία νοήματος στην

ανάγνωση (Colclough, 2011, σ. 112), όσο και της δυναμικής αυτών των χώρων σε σχέση με τη διαμόρφωση αναγνωστικών πρακτικών.

2. Γιατί επιλέχθηκε εθνογραφική προσέγγιση και πώς έγινε η έρευνα

Κατά τον Ντε Σερτώ οι σχετικές έρευνες αφορούν ως επί το πλείστον τη διδασκαλία της ανάγνωσης. Σημειώνει επίσης ότι στο πεδίο της Κοινωνιολογίας οι έρευνες είναι στατικού τύπου, καθώς περισσότερο υπολογίζουν τη συσχέτιση ανάμεσα στα αντικείμενα που διαβάζει κανείς, την κοινωνική υπαγωγή τους και τους τόπους στους οποίους συχνάζει, παρά αναλύουν αυτή καθαυτή τη διεργασία της ανάγνωσης, τις τροπικότητες και την τυπολογία της (Ντε Σερτώ, 2010).

Η παρούσα έρευνα επιθυμεί να συμβάλει στο να «φέρει στο φως την αυτονομία της αναγνωστικής πρακτικής κάτω από τον ιμπεριαλισμό της γραφής» (Ντε Σερτώ, 2010, σ. 376). Διότι, ναι μεν σημειώνονται έρευνες που μελετάνε τον γραμματισμό ως κοινωνική πρακτική, αλλά αυτές αφορούν κατά κανόνα τον γραμματισμό ως σύνολο (γραφή- ανάγνωση) ή είναι έρευνες που αναφέρονται κυρίως στη γραφή. Η παρούσα έρευνα εντάσσεται στο κλίμα των εθνογραφικών μελετών περί γραμματισμού, διαφοροποιείται όμως από τις προηγούμενες, εστιάζοντας στην ανάγνωση. Αντλώντας από την Κοινωνική Θεωρία του Γραμματισμού πρεσβεύει ότι για να κατανοήσουμε την ανάγνωση πρέπει να δούμε πώς χρησιμοποιείται, τι πραγματικά κάνουν τα υποκείμενα με αυτή και τι νοήματα έχει σε συγκεκριμένα περιεχόμενα (Papel, 2005, σ. 59, Barton και Hamilton, 1998, σ. 3, Besnier, 2000). Έτσι, το σημείο εκκίνησης για αυτή την προσέγγιση είναι ότι η ανάγνωση είναι κοινωνική πρακτική ισχυρισμός που δίνει το πρόταγμα σε μία εθνογραφική σκοπιά.

Θα μπορούσαμε να ισχυριστούμε ότι η ανάγνωση ως δραστηριότητα χαρακτηρίζεται από ρευστότητα και συνεπώς λαμβάνει κάθε φορά το σχήμα του περιέχοντος χώρου. Να ένας τολμηρός παραλληλισμός που αναδεικνύει την ευμεταβλητότητα της αναγνωστικής δραστηριότητας.

Οι συνεντεύξεις σε βάθος (in-depth interview) αποτελούν την κύρια πηγή δεδομένων που χρησιμοποιήθηκαν στην παρούσα έρευνα η οποία αποτελεί μέρος μιας ευρύτερης μελέτης για τις αναγνωστικές πρακτικές και τις χρήσεις βιβλίων από είκοσι ένα άτομα αστικής μεσαίας τάξης σε τρεις ελληνικές πόλεις. Οι συνεντεύξεις πραγματοποιήθηκαν κατά το διάστημα 2012-2013 δια ζώσης στην Αθήνα, τη Θεσσαλονίκη και τη Μυτιλήνη. Η συμμετοχή των υποκειμένων έγινε με την τεχνική δειγματοληψίας «χιονοστιβάδα», μια μη πιθανοτική μέθοδο

δειγματοληψίας που χρησιμοποιείται στην έρευνα πεδίου κατά την οποία κάθε άτομο που συμμετέχει στις συνεντεύξεις καλείται να προτείνει άλλα άτομα να συμμετάσχουν στην έρευνα (Babbie 2011, σ. 292, Goodman 1961). Κατά συνέπεια, τα συγκεκριμένα κριτήρια καθορίστηκαν από τους ίδιους τους συμμετέχοντες, με πρωταρχική προϋπόθεση να είναι κάποιος «αναγνώστης» ή, πιο συγκεκριμένα, «φιλιαναγνώστης» ή «βιβλιόφιλος». Η δειγματοληψία χιονοστιβάδας αναγνωρίζει τη σημασία του κοινωνικού δικτύου και των σχέσεων για τη δημιουργία ουσιαστικών συνδέσεων με τους συμμετέχοντες. Η μελέτη αυτή αναδεικνύει τους τρόπους με τους οποίους η ανάγνωση συνδέει τους ανθρώπους (Barton & Hamilton 1998, σ. 16) αποκαλύπτοντας ένα αναδυόμενο δίκτυο «αναγνωστών». Τα ονόματα των υποκειμένων που αναφέρονται είναι ψευδώνυμα. Η ηλικία, η απασχόληση και η κατάσταση ζωής, όπως ήταν κατά την περίοδο των συνεντεύξεων, παρατίθενται στην συνέχεια συνδεδεμένα με τα αποσπάσματα λόγου των αναγνωστών/τριών.

Η συνέντευξη σε βάθος αποτελεί ποιοτική ερευνητική τεχνική που περιλαμβάνει εντατικές ατομικές συνεντεύξεις με ένα μικρό αριθμό συνομιλητών για να διερευνηθούν οι οπτικές τους για μια συγκεκριμένη ιδέα ή κατάσταση (Gibbs, 2008). Στη συγκεκριμένη έρευνα οι συνεντεύξεις σε βάθος σχεδιάστηκαν για να επιτρέπουν στα υποκείμενα της έρευνας να εκφράζονται ελεύθερα όσο το δυνατόν περισσότερο όταν συζητούν τις εμπειρίες, τις απόψεις και τις αναμνήσεις τους. Οι συνεντεύξεις ήταν μη δομημένες, χωρίς προκαθορισμένες ερωτήσεις, αλλά ακολουθούν τον «συνήθη χαρακτήρα της εθνογραφικής συνομιλίας που έγκειται στην ένταση μεταξύ της «φυσικότητας» και της «ενορχήστρωσης» μιας καλής συνομιλίας όπως εννοούνται σε εθνογραφικό πλαίσιο (Madden, 2010, σ. 65). Αυτό επέτρεψε στα υποκείμενα να πουν τις ιστορίες που σχετίζονται με την ανάγνωση που ήταν σημαντικές για αυτά, αντί να απαντούν σε προκαθορισμένες ερωτήσεις (Barton & Hamilton, 1998, σ. 64). Κατά τη διάρκεια της συνέντευξης ωστόσο, σε ορισμένα σημεία, αναδύονταν ερωτήσεις που κρίθηκε σκόπιμο να τεθούν καθώς θα εμπλουτίζαν ή θα αναβάθμιζαν τα δεδομένα. Όποτε συνέβαινε αυτό ήταν με ιδιαίτερη προσοχή στο απρόσκοπτο της αφήγησης των υποκειμένων. Κατά περίπτωση οι ερωτήσεις αυτές μπορεί να απευθύνονταν σε περιγραφικό επίπεδο (*πώς αντιλαμβάνεσαι*), σε δομικό επίπεδο (*ποια η σχέση*) ή να επιχειρούσαν συγκρίσεις (*ποια διαφορά*) (McCurdy, Spradley και Shandy 1972:178-179).

Απώτερος στόχος ήταν να αναδειχθούν ποιοτικά εθνογραφικά δεδομένα που θα βοηθήσουν στην κατανόηση το βαθύτερου νοήματος που κατέχει η ανάγνωση στις ζωές των υποκειμένων. Συνθέτοντας και αναλύοντας τα δεδομένα αυτά, σκοπός της έρευνας είναι να αποκτήσει μια βαθιά κατανόηση της εγγενούς σημασίας της ανάγνωσης στη ζωή των ερωτηθέντων, καθώς και

να διερευνήσει την αυτοβιογραφική εξέλιξη των αναγνωστικών τους εμπειριών (Mason 2011: 175).

Το σχέδιο της συνέντευξης επικεντρώθηκε σε θεματικές περιοχές. Ακολούθησε θεματική ανάλυση με στόχο τον εντοπισμό και την ανάπτυξη θεμάτων που προκύπτουν απευθείας από τα ποιοτικά δεδομένα. Η θεματική ανάλυση επέτρεψε μια διερευνητική προσέγγιση για την κατανόηση των δεδομένων (Mason 2002). Οι θεματικές περιοχές διερευνούν τις συμφραζόμενες πτυχές της ανάγνωσης, συμπεριλαμβανομένης της εμφάνισής της σε συγκεκριμένους θεσμούς, τοποθεσίες και χρονικές περιόδους. Μέσα από τις θεματικές περιοχές η ανάλυση εμβαθύνει σε απτές εκφράσεις της ανάγνωσης, όπως προσωπικές εμπειρίες ή αναμνήσεις, και εξετάζει τις σχέσεις που καλλιεργεί η ανάγνωση. Μερικοί από τους κύριους τομείς που διερευνήθηκαν στις συνεντεύξεις ήταν οι εξής: αξίες και στάσεις που σχετίζονται με την ανάγνωση, τις αναγνωστικές πρακτικές, τα βιβλία (ως αντικείμενα/περιεχόμενο), τους χώρους ανάγνωσης και τις αυτοβιογραφικές ιστορίες σχετικά με την ανάγνωση και τα βιβλία.

Αρχικά η συζήτηση εστιάζει στον ιδιωτικό χώρο, χώρο συλλογής των βιβλίων και περιγράφει τα ζητήματα που σχετίζονται με την ιδιοκτησία τους και αναζητά νοηματοδοτήσεις της προσωπικής βιβλιοθήκης. Στη συνέχεια, στρέφεται στην προβληματοποίηση χώρων της ανάγνωσης όπως αναδύονται στον λόγο των πληροφορητών επιχειρώντας την ανάδειξη πρακτικών και σκέψεων που φαίνεται πως θέτουν ζητήματα για το χώρο. Η συζήτηση φέρνει επίσης στο προσκήνιο τη διερεύνηση των σχέσεων των υποκειμένων με τον χώρο της βιβλιοθήκης ως θεσμικού οργάνου. Αυτό προσφέρει στοιχεία για να συζητηθεί ο ρόλος ηγεμονικών μορφών ανάγνωσης σε σχέση με τις πρακτικές των αναγνωστών/τριών.

3. Χώροι και σωματοποιημένη ανάγνωση: από την ιδιωτική στη δημόσια σφαίρα

Η ανάγνωση είναι μία υλική δραστηριότητα που αφορά το σώμα και εγγράφεται σε ένα χώρο και σε μία σχέση με τον εαυτό και τους άλλους (Σιδηροπούλου, 2015). Για τη βαθύτερη κατανόηση της φαινομενολογίας της ανάγνωσης η χωρική τοποθέτηση του σώματος που διαβάζει έχει ιδιαίτερη σημασία (Colclough, 2011, σ. 99). Εδώ θα εστιάσουμε στη σημασιοδότηση του χώρου στον οποίο κινείται η ανάγνωση εγγράφοντας την εμπειρία στον χώρο, προσδίδοντας νόημα και μεταμορφώνοντάς τον σε «αναγνωστικό». Σε αυτή τη διαδικασία τα υποκείμενα συνάπτουν σχέσεις με τις τοποθεσίες που καταλαμβάνουν αλλά και με μνήμες που εμπλέκουν ανθρώπους και γεγονότα. Ένας χώρος, άλλωστε, αποκτά νόημα, σημασία και συνδέσεις μέσα από ανθρώπινες δραστηριότητες, αναμνήσεις και πολιτιστικές

πρακτικές. Συνδέεται με μια αίσθηση ταυτότητας, ιστορίας και συναισθήματος. Συνεπώς, μπορεί να γίνει κατανοητός ως η βιωμένη εμπειρία και ερμηνεία με την οποία εμποτίζεται από άτομα ή κοινότητες.

Εθνογραφικές μελέτες του υλικού πολιτισμού που αφορούν συναφή θέματα, ασχολούνται με τον τρόπο που οι χώροι εμπεριέχουν παράγουν και αναπαράγουν, αλλάζουν και τροποποιούν την προσωπική και κοινωνική εμπειρία. Μία αντίληψη της έννοιας του χώρου που έχει επηρεάσει την ανθρωπολογική προοπτική καθιερώνει ο Lefebvre (Outhwaite, 2003, σ. 654, Moran, 2005, σ. 116) που ισχυρίζεται ότι ο τόπος που διεξάγεται ή υπάρχει κάτι κατασκευάζεται από χωρικές πρακτικές και αναπαραστάσεις. Μπορούμε να θεωρήσουμε την πρακτική του χώρου ως «μία διαλεκτική διάδραση», ενώ η αναπαράσταση του χώρου, από την άλλη πλευρά, αποτελείται από κυρίαρχες συζητήσεις, οι οποίες «προσδιορίζουν τι βιώνουμε, τι αντιλαμβανόμαστε και τι σκεφτόμαστε». Οι αναπαραστάσεις του χώρου είναι εκεί που βιώνεται η καθημερινότητα, εκεί που τα υποκείμενα τοποθετούν τις εμπειρίες τους (Lefebvre, 1991).

Η υλική και εννοιολογική παραγωγή των χώρων ανάγνωσης, όπως συζητείται από τους αναγνώστες/τριες στην παρούσα έρευνα, συσχετίζεται με το παραπάνω θεωρητικό πλαίσιο. Οι συνομιλητές/τριες αναφέρονται σε διαδικασίες όπου η αναγνωστική εμπειρία προσαρμόζεται μέσω του σώματος στον χώρο που συμβαίνει ή/ και συμμορφώνεται με υποδείξεις, οδηγίες, εντολές που υποβάλλονται ή επιβάλλονται από τους ίδιους τους χώρους. Για να καταλάβουμε τη δυναμική ως κάνουμε έναν ίσως τολμηρό παραλληλισμό που αναδεικνύει όμως την ευμεταβλητότητα της αναγνωστικής δραστηριότητας. Θα μπορούσαμε να ισχυριστούμε ότι η ανάγνωση ως δραστηριότητα χαρακτηρίζεται από ρευστότητα και συνεπώς λαμβάνει κάθε φορά το σχήμα του περιέχοντος χώρου.

Αναζητώντας τις κατάλληλες συνθήκες, ή αλλιώς την κατάλληλη «ατμόσφαιρα» (Latour, 2007), ορισμένοι θεωρούν το σπίτι τους ή την εγγύς επέκτασή του, όπως το μπαλκόνι τους για παράδειγμα, τον πιο κατάλληλο χώρο για διάβασμα. Η ιδιωτική σφαίρα εξάιρεται για την καταλληλότητά της όσον αφορά την αναγνωστική δραστηριότητα. Ελλείπεται κοινωνικότητας, δεν έχει επίσημο χαρακτήρα συνεπώς θεωρείται μία ξεκούραστη δραστηριότητα με την οποία απολαμβάνει κανείς τον χώρο του σε μία σχέση αλληλεπίδρασης με την απόλαυση της ανάγνωσης. Ο κοινωνικός χαρακτήρας της δημόσιας σφαίρας αντιμετωπίζεται ως εμπόδιο στην προσήλωση για τον Νικηφόρο, πενήτα ετών πανεπιστημιακό, που ζει με την σύζυγό του στην Αθήνα. Μάλιστα, για τον ίδιο το διάβασμα εκτός ιδιωτικής σφαίρας ερμηνεύεται ως μία μορφή επίδειξης:

Διαβάζω στο σπίτι, σπανίως σε καφέ και έξω. Το διάβασμα είναι επαγγελματικό και άρα πρέπει να γίνεται στο γραφείο, στους χώρους εργασίας, το δε άλλο είναι ιδιωτικό και θεωρώ ότι πρέπει και εκείνο να γίνεται στο σπίτι και ακόμα σε πιο ιδιωτικούς χώρους όπως είναι σε μένα το κρεβάτι ή ένας καναπές. (...) Θεωρώ ότι το διάβασμα έξω, κατά την άποψή μου, γίνεται μόνο για λόγους επίδειξης... δεν μπορώ να διαβάσω έξω! (Νικηφόρος)

Στο μπαλκόνι διαβάζω αρκετά. Όταν είμαι στο σπίτι ο χώρος που θα διαλέξω είναι το μπαλκόνι. Μ' αρέσει που είναι εξωτερικός χώρος, μ' αρέσει ο φωτισμός... Νομίζω το φως είναι το κύριο. Αλλά κι οι καρέκλες που έχουμε στο μπαλκόνι. (Γελάει) Είναι αναπαυτικές. (Έλλη, τριάντα ετών, μένει με τον σύντροφό της στην Αθήνα, υπεύθυνη γραφείου σε Πανεπιστημιακό Πρόγραμμα)

Δεν πρέπει να υποθέσουμε όμως, ότι το σπίτι δεν μπορεί να αποτελέσει πηγή πολλαπλών αποσπάσεων, όπως επισημαίνει ο Αντώνης, τριάντα δύο ετών, που ζει στη Θεσσαλονίκη και είναι υποψήφιος διδάκτορας Πολιτικών Επιστημών. Παρακάτω, μου εξηγεί τις λεπτές αποχρώσεις στις μεταβολές που αντιλαμβάνεται στην «ατμόσφαιρα», μετά από απαιτητικό και πολύωρο διάβασμα στο σπίτι. Όταν οι συνθήκες δεν είναι πλέον κατάλληλες, χρειάζεται συνήθως να αλλάξει περιβάλλον πηγαίνοντας σε ένα καφέ πολλές φορές για να συνεχίσει τη μελέτη.

Όταν –που έχει τύχει λόγω των σπουδών- διαβάζω πάρα πάρα πολύ και όλη η μέρα φεύγει με διάβασμα, από ένα σημείο και μετά αν έχει αυτό το καταναγκαστικό... αρχίζουν να σ' ενοχλούν ή να επηρεάζουν την απόδοσή σου μικρές λεπτομέρειες νομίζω. Δηλαδή τι θερμοκρασία θα έχει το δωμάτιο... γιατί είναι ο χώρος που κάθεσαι όλη την ημέρα και καμιά φορά είναι πολύ ανυπόφορο και σωματικά και ψυχικά –ιδίως όταν πρέπει να διαβάσεις κάτι που δεν θέλεις. Και έχω συνειδητοποιήσει ότι βοηθάνε πάρα πολύ οι κατάλληλες συνθήκες, ώστε να είναι ποιοτική η ανάγνωση.

4. Βιβλιοθήκες: ο κατ' εξοχήν χώρος ανάγνωσης

Αν αυτά συμβαίνουν στη σφαίρα της ιδιωτικότητας, ας δούμε τώρα πώς κατασκευάζεται η αναγνωστική δραστηριότητα μέσα σε συγκεκριμένους θεσμοθετημένους χώρους, επικεντρώνοντας το ενδιαφέρον στο παράδειγμα της βιβλιοθήκης. Μέσα από την υλικότητα του αλλά και την οργάνωσή του ένα κτήριο επιδρά στην κίνηση των ανθρώπων μέσα σε αυτό και στην ανθρώπινη συμπεριφορά, δημιουργώντας ένα πλαίσιο εμπειρίας και αποθαρρύνοντας κάποιες μορφές κοινωνικής επαφής ενώ ενθαρρύνει άλλες. Η βιβλιοθήκη

είναι ένας χώρος ειδικός, αφιερωμένος στην ανάγνωση, ένας από τους λίγους τόπους όπου η ανάγνωση είναι μία συγχρονική συλλογική ασχολία. Μέσα από την οργάνωση και τη ρύθμιση του χώρου, του χρόνου και των κινήσεων τα σώματά μας εκπαιδεύονται διαμορφώνονται από κυρίαρχες ιστορικά μορφές χρήσης της βιβλιοθήκης ενώ οι οδηγίες για τη χρήση της ίδιας της βιβλιοθήκης -κανόνες προκειμένου να συντηρηθούν συλλογές που προορίζονταν για κοινή χρήση (Saenger, 1997)- επιτείνουν την αίσθηση ελέγχου και ρύθμισης¹.

Υπό την έννοια της ετεροτοπίας του Foucault η βιβλιοθήκη θα μπορούσε να προσδιοριστεί ως «ένας τόπος που συγκεντρώνει όλους τους χρόνους και που θα είναι ο ίδιος εκτός χρόνου και στο απυρόβλητο του χρόνου» (Φουκώ, 1984). Οι ετεροτοπίες συνδέονται με ετεροχρονισμούς. Η ετεροτοπία ξεκινάει να λειτουργεί πλήρως όταν οι άνθρωποι βρίσκονται σε ένα είδος απόλυτης ρήξης με τον παραδοσιακό τους χρόνο. Μια πλήρης συζήτηση για την ετεροτοπία ωστόσο βρίσκεται πέρα από το πεδίο αυτής της μελέτης. Υποδεικνύεται όμως το γενικότερο περίγραμμα μιας τέτοιας σύνδεσης καθώς δίνεται έμφαση σε εκείνες τις στιγμές που οι αναγνώστες/τριες νοηματοδοτούν το χαρακτηριστικό της ρήξης με τον παραδοσιακό χώρο και τον χρόνο ως ιδιαίτερα γοητευτικό στοιχείο. Η συσχέτιση τονίζεται ιδιαίτερα όταν η βιβλιοθήκη ανταποκρίνεται σε παραδοσιακές αναπαραστάσεις (ξύλινη, παλιά κτλ). Η ατμόσφαιρα της βιβλιοθήκης όπου φυλάσσονται βιβλία άλλων εποχών δημιουργεί μία αίσθηση προστασίας. Στη δημιουργία αυτού του κλίματος συντελεί η παλιά κατασκευή, η φτιαγμένη από ξύλο, τα μικρά πράσινα πορτατίφ. Οι πολύ μοντέρνες βιβλιοθήκες –οι ‘τέλειες’– παρουσιάζονται κρύες και κατά κάποιο τρόπο δεν παρέχουν αίσθηση προστασίας (Eco, 2012, σ. 306).

Και στο πανεπιστήμιο ήταν δύο βιβλιοθήκες, μία ήταν πολύ παλιά και μία μοντέρνα φωτεινή και διάβαζα καλύτερα στην άλλη, την παλιά...που δεν πήγαινε σχεδόν κανείς. Αλλά ήταν πάρα πολύ ωραία. Ήταν σα να ήσουνα πώς να σου πω...ήταν σε άλλο κόσμο. Ένωθεσ ότι ήσουνα... δεν είχε πολύ κόσμο, ήταν λίγο το παλιό το πανεπιστήμιο, τα χαμηλά φώτα, έτσι σκοτεινά... ήταν ωραία, μ' άρεσε εκεί. Εκεί μπορούσα και διάβαζα! (Μυρτώ, τριάντα πέντε χρονών, μεγαλωμένη στο Λονδίνο από Έλληνες γονείς, δουλεύει σε ιδιωτικό σχολείο στην Αθήνα)

Όμως, το χαρακτηριστικό των ετεροτοπιών που επισημαίνουν περισσότερο οι πληροφορητές/τριες δεν είναι αυτό, αλλά ιδίως το γεγονός της ύπαρξης ενός συστήματος ανοίγματος και κλεισίματος το οποίο ανταποκρίνεται σε συγκεκριμένους τρόπους επιτέλεσης και πρόσβασης (Φουκώ, 1984). Οι πληροφορητές προβάλλουν αντιστάσεις στην κατασκευή της

¹ Βλ. χαρακτηριστικά: «Κανονισμός 36ος: Οι αναγνώστες δεν επιτρέπεται να κυκλοφορούν ξυπόλητοι στη Βιβλιοθήκη». University of Cambridge, Moore Library.

αναγνωστικής δραστηριότητας με ένα συγκεκριμένο τρόπο που γίνεται στο πλαίσιο της βιβλιοθήκης. Εντοπίζουν ποικίλους λόγους για τους οποίους απέχουν από ένα χώρο όπου η μορφή ανάγνωσης πρέπει να υπακούει σε οριοθετήσεις. Το κοινωνικό πλαίσιο και η ιδέα πολλών ατόμων που διαβάζουν ταυτόχρονα στον ίδιο χώρο, είναι βασικά στοιχεία που αποθαρρύνουν τον Νικηφόρο. Επιπρόσθετα, ο Άρης, είκοσι εννέα ετών που διδάσκει μουσική σε δημοτικό σχολείο αναφέρει ως εμπόδιο τις συνθήκες θερμοκρασίας που επικρατούν ώστε να επιτείνουν την τάση του για ύπνο. Εν τέλει, και οι δύο κάνουν λόγω για μη-ποιοτική ανάγνωση στον χώρο της βιβλιοθήκης.

Θεωρώ ότι είναι λίγο καλύτερο από το διάβασμα της τουαλέτας. Γιατί είναι πρόσκαιρο διάβασμα. Είναι λίγο καλύτερο ή ίσως αρκετά καλύτερο αλλά δεν έχει καμία σχέση με το διάβασμα του σπιτιού. Αλλά δεν έχει καμία σχέση, το άλλο είναι πρόσκαιρο διάβασμα (...) Δεν αισθάνομαι πολύ άνετα, γιατί είναι ο χώρος πολλών ανθρώπων, αλλά όταν αρχίζω και εμπλακώ στο διάβασμα ξεχνάω αυτό το γεγονός και διαβάζω. Πάντως δε με παροτρύνει σε καμία περίπτωση. (Νικηφόρος)

Βαριέμαι. Δεν ξέρω γιατί. Με πιάνει νύστα στις βιβλιοθήκες... Ζέστη! Έχει ζέστη στις βιβλιοθήκες. Πολύ ζέστη στις βιβλιοθήκες! (Άρης)

Η ησυχία που επιβάλλεται στους χώρους της βιβλιοθήκης για να προστατεύσει τη διάσπαση προσοχής των αναγνωστών/τριών και η ιδέα της βιβλιοθήκης ως ησυχαστηρίου (Saenger, 2006, σ. 171) φαίνεται ότι δυσχεραίνει την ανάγνωση ορισμένων πληροφορητών/τριών. Ορισμένοι αναγνώστες/τριες, όπως ο Κυριάκος και η Έλλη, θεωρούν την επιβεβλημένη ησυχία ως αποτρεπτικό παράγοντα για μια αποδοτική ανάγνωση. Η «αφύσικη» απουσία θορύβου, η απουσία κίνησης και δράσης λειτουργεί παραδόξως για κάποιους αναγνώστες παρεμποδιστικά στη συγκέντρωση υπενθυμίζοντας τους κάθε στιγμή την καταστολή τους.

Αισθανόμουν λίγο άσχημα γιατί όλος ο κόσμος που πήγαινε εκεί για να διαβάσει, έπρεπε να διατηρήσει μια εξαναγκασμένη ησυχία και το θέμα με τις βιβλιοθήκες... δεν μπόρεσα ποτέ να συγκεντρωθώ, να διαβάσω ουσιαστικά, γιατί όταν έχεις ένα σταθερό ήχο δεν σ' ενοχλεί. Ενώ απ' την απόλυτη ησυχία το να πέσει ένα μολύβι είναι ήχος εκείνη τη στιγμή. Δηλαδή, έχεις σκαμπανεβάσματα...ο ήχος του δρόμου που είναι σταθερός είναι ζzzzzzzzzzz και δεν αλλάζει γιατί είναι ζzzzzz. Με βοηθάει περισσότερο να συγκεντρωθώ. Στην απόλυτη ησυχία, το να κάνεις αυτό και να ακουστεί, ταραξεί κάτι. (Κυριάκος, τριάντα χρονών, ζει στη Θεσσαλονίκη με τη σύντροφό του, δουλεύει ως υπάλληλος σε κεντρικό βιβλιοπωλείο της πόλης)

Ενώ μ' αρέσει το περιβάλλον της βιβλιοθήκης, δυσκολεύομαι να νιώσω οικεία. Δε νιώθω καθόλου οικεία... αυτή η ησυχία η οποία όμως μπορεί να διαταραχθεί κι από κάτι τελείως άσχετο... δεν ξέρω. Δε μου δημιουργεί καθόλου συνθήκες τέτοιες που να μπορώ να συγκεντρωθώ. Δεν μ' αρέσει. (...) Που σε παρατηρούν. Ενώ στο μετρό, νιώθω ότι γίνομαι λίγο απαρατήρητη με το βιβλίο. Ενώ στη βιβλιοθήκη νομίζω ότι είναι πολύ κοινωνικό... Τώρα θα μαζευτούμε εδώ να διαβάσουμε, αλλά θα κοιταχτούμε και λίγο. Δεν μου αρέσει, όχι. (Έλλη)

Ένας επιπρόσθετος λόγος για τον οποίο η ανάγνωση θεωρείται λιγότερο αποδοτική ή ποιοτική από πολλούς συνομιλητές, προκύπτει από τον κοινωνικό παράγοντα όπως θίγει παραπάνω η Έλλη μιλώντας για την παρατήρηση, το βλέμμα που ευνοεί η ακινησία και η έντονη οπτική δραστηριότητα σε σχέση με οποιαδήποτε άλλη. Το θέμα αυτό απασχολεί και επανέρχεται και σε άλλες συνομιλίες. Ο Άρης είναι ιδιαίτερα επικριτικός, καθώς θεωρεί ότι πολλοί χρησιμοποιούν τη βιβλιοθήκη ως χώρο με την επίφαση ανάγνωσης και με μόνο σκοπό την κοινωνική επαφή. Η Θάλεια, παρουσιάζεται περισσότερο μετριοπαθής, αλλά ωστόσο συντείνει στην άποψη ότι δεν λειτουργεί κανείς μόνο “αναγνωστικά” στη βιβλιοθήκη αλλά περισσότερο κοινωνικά.

Στις βιβλιοθήκες γενικά νιώθω άβολα. Νιώθω να σηκωθώ να φύγω από κει πέρα. Άκου, θα σου φανεί παράξενο και άσχημο αλλά, νομίζω ότι υπάρχει πάρα πολύ μεγάλη υποκρισία στις βιβλιοθήκες! Δεν μπορώ να καταλάβω γιατί να πρέπει κανείς να πάει σε μια βιβλιοθήκη για να διαβάσει. Καταλαβαίνω γιατί να πάει να δανειστεί ένα βιβλίο από κει, αλλά ας πούμε θεωρώ ότι εκεί πάει ο κόσμος για να τον δουν! (...) Νομίζω ότι εκεί πάει κανείς για να ζευγαρώσει. Κι αυτούς που δεν παραδέχονται ότι πάνε κάπου για να ζευγαρώσουν, εγώ τους αντιπαθώ πάρα πολύ. (Άρης)

(...) όσες φορές έχω βρεθεί σε βιβλιοθήκη στο παρελθόν, κυρίως στα χρόνια του πανεπιστημίου –πάντα ασχολιόμουν με το τι κάνουν οι γύρω μου–δηλαδή ακόμα κι αν δεν ήθελα τελικά έβλεπα πάντα τι κάνουν οι άλλοι, έψαχνα να βρω γνωστούς... με αποσπούσε πάρα πολύ αυτό, δε διάβαζα... (Θάλεια, τριάντα τεσσάρων χρονών, φαρμακοποιός, ζει με τους γονείς της στη Θεσσαλονίκη.)

Οι περισσότεροι/ες από τους/τις πληροφορητές/τριες δεν νιώθουν ότι δεν μπορούν να ασκήσουν τις ιδιωτικές πρακτικές ανάγνωσης σε έναν κοινό χώρο ανάγνωσης που υπόκειται σε ρυθμίσεις, όπως η βιβλιοθήκη. Ένας λόγος που απορρίπτουν την ανάγνωση στον χώρο της βιβλιοθήκης είναι γιατί δίνουν προτεραιότητα στην απόλαυση της ανάγνωσης, η οποία συνεπάγεται μια μορφή ελευθερίας, μη ορατή συνήθως στη δημόσια σφαίρα. Σε αυτό το

πλαίσιο, παραδοσιακές αξίες που συνδέονται με κανονισμούς της βιβλιοθήκης καταρρίπτονται σε μία σφαίρα που δεν υπόκειται σε πλαίσιο έξωθεν ελέγχου, όπως συμβαίνει στη βιβλιοθήκη.

Δεν μου έρχεται να διαβάσω στη βιβλιοθήκη... Γιατί δεν είμαι μόνη! (Χριστίνα, πενήντα ετών, ζει στην Αθήνα, διδάσκει στην Τριτοβάθμια Εκπαίδευση)

Δε θέλω να το κάνω. Γιατί καταρχήν μπορούν να κοιτάν' οι άλλοι τι διαβάζω και δε μ' αρέσει αυτό. Δε μ' αρέσει να βλέπει ο άλλος τι διαβάζεις. (Μάριος δεκαεννέα χρόνων, φοιτητής σε Σχολή Κινηματογράφου)

Η άσκηση της εξουσίας που συνθέτουν οι ρυθμίσεις της βιβλιοθήκης γίνεται μέσω της επιτήρησης. Ο Foucault ορίζει την επιτήρηση ως «ένα σύνολο δράσεων πάνω σε δυνατές δράσεις –ενεργεί στο πεδίο δυνατότητας όπου έρχεται να εγγραφεί η συμπεριφορά των δρώντων υποκειμένων»– συμπληρώνοντας ότι «παρακινεί, επάγει, εκτρέπει, διευκολύνει ή κάνει κάτι πιο δύσκολο, διευρύνει ή περιορίζει, καθιστά κάτι περισσότερο ή λιγότερο πιθανό. Οριακά εξαναγκάζει ή εμποδίζει απόλυτα» (Φουκώ, 2008, σ. 92). Ο Lyons (2012) ισχυρίζεται ότι το μοντέλο επιτήρησης ήταν το ίδιο στις βιβλιοθήκες της Αγγλίας του 19^{ου} αιώνα όπως αυτό που περιγράφει ο Foucault για τις φυλακές. Μάλιστα, κάνει λόγο και για “αρχιτεκτονικό εκφοβισμό” τον οποίο ανέδυε η νεοκλασική αρχιτεκτονική των βιβλιοθηκών που δομούσε ένα -όχι και τόσο φιλόξενο- περιβάλλον για τους αναγνώστες εργατικής τάξης.

Με τί-πο-τα δεν μπορώ να διαβάσω σε βιβλιοθήκη, γιατί αν και εγώ είμαι ήσυχος άνθρωπος όταν διαβάζω δεν κάνω φασαρία, όταν μου επιβάλλουν την ησυχία και υπάρχει γύρω κόσμος που του έχει επιβληθεί η ησυχία και να είναι μετρημένες οι κινήσεις τους... αυτό με καταπιέζει αφόρητα. Μπορώ να πάω να διαλέξω ένα βιβλίο από εκεί, και να το διαβάσω στον χώρο μου. (Βίκτωρας, τριάντα πέντε, διδάσκει Πληροφορική σε δημοτικό σχολείο)

Στον αντίποδα βρίσκεται η απόλαυση της ανάγνωσης. Για τη Φωτεινή, που είναι δεκαεννέα ετών, είναι φοιτήτρια σχολής Πληροφορικής και ζει μεταξύ Θεσσαλονίκης και Ιωαννίνων, μία αναπαυτική θέση, μία ελευθερία κινήσεων και η ελευθερία του καπνίσματος συνθέτουν ένα πλαίσιο απόλαυσης το οποίο δεν μπορεί να υπάρξει στη βιβλιοθήκη.

Ε δεν, δεν... Δεν μπορείς να καπνίσεις, δεν μπορείς να βολευτείς καλά. Ξέρω εγώ είναι πολύ συγκεκριμένο το πώς θα διαβάσεις στη βιβλιοθήκη. Είναι προκαθορισμένο. Σου λέει αυτό είναι το τραπέζι σου, αυτή είναι η καρέκλα σου, αυτός είναι ο χώρος σου αυτό θα κάνεις, δεν μπορείς να το κάνεις κάπως αλλιώς.

Ίσως να μην έχουμε αγγίξει ακόμη την πρακτική αποαγιοποίηση του χώρου των βιβλιοθηκών και οι βιβλιοθήκες που έχουμε συνηθίσει ή οι αναπαραστάσεις τους να απέχουν λίγο από το πρότυπο του 15ου αιώνα, στον οποίο ήταν «ιερός χώρος κατάνυξης όπου πρέπει να επικρατεί

Ορισμένοι αναγνώστες/τριες θεωρούν την επιβεβλημένη ησυχία της Βιβλιοθήκης ως αποτρεπτικό παράγοντα για μια αποδοτική ανάγνωση. Η «αφύσικη» απουσία θορύβου, η απουσία κίνησης και δράσης λειτουργεί παραδόξως για κάποιους αναγνώστες παρεμποδιστικά στη συγκέντρωση υπενθυμίζοντάς τους κάθε στιγμή την καταστολή τους.

ησυχία» σύμφωνα με τους κανονισμούς της βιβλιοθήκης της Σορβόνης (Saenger, 2006, σ. 171). Οι πληροφορητές/τριες εν τούτοις, αμφισβητούν τον χώρο, αμφισβητώντας μέσα στις «ενδοθεσμικές» σχέσεις εξουσίας που οι θεσμοί δρουν ουσιαστικά με κανόνες ρητούς και άρρητους. Ουσιαστικά, αμφισβητούν τους κανόνες ενός συγκεκριμένου τύπου

ανάγνωσης απέχοντας, οι περισσότεροι, από το χώρο που προσδιορίζουν ως ζώνη ελέγχου, δηλώνοντας με την αποχή τους την απόρριψη της ισχύος και της “αξίας” του. Η αμφισβήτηση αυτή μπορεί να συσχετιστεί με ένα νέο «modus legendi» (τρόπος ανάγνωσης) του οποίου οι φορείς είναι κυρίως οι νεαροί αναγνώστες (Cavallo και Chartier (2008). Η ανάγνωση σε αυτό το νέο πλαίσιο «επιτρέπει» μια εντελώς ελεύθερη ατομική στάση (το να διαβάσει κανείς ξαπλωμένος στο πάτωμα, ακουμπισμένος στον τοίχο, κάτω ή πάνω από/στο το γραφείο) προκειμένου να διαμορφώσει έναν χώρο οικειότητας (Sidiropoulou, in press).

Σε αντιδιαστολή με τους περισσότερους πληροφορητές, η Ζωή, τριάντα ετών, φιλόλογος, που μένει με τους γονείς της στην Αθήνα, προσαρμόζεται πιο εύκολα στα δεδομένα. Κάνει, επίσης, λόγο για τη συλλογικότητα της αναγνωστικής εμπειρίας ως συντροφική σχέση. Φαίνεται ότι παρ’ ότι αναγνωρίζει την επιβολή των κανόνων που επικρατούν, τους στρέφει προς όφελός της. Για αυτό το λόγο επιλέγει συνειδητά την επιτήρηση, σε μία πολιτική εκμετάλλευσης των δεδομένων συνθηκών για την απόδοσή της. «Η βιβλιοθήκη συνεντίζει τους απείθαρχους αναγνώστες» φαίνεται να λέει «και εγώ ανήκω σε αυτή την κατηγορία». Αν και η ίδια θεωρεί ότι αξιοποιεί τις συνθήκες, μου δίνει την αίσθηση ότι πρόκειται απλώς για την εκλογίκευση μίας πλήρους εσωτερίκευσης, μία εξορθολογικευμένη πειθάρχηση.

Αυτό που μου αρέσει στη βιβλιοθήκη – επειδή έχω πρόβλημα με την προσοχή ιδιαίτερα όταν είμαι στο σπίτι, υπάρχουν τόσα άλλα πράγματα που θα μπορούσα να κάνω στο σπίτι από το να δουλέψω... Στη βιβλιοθήκη υπάρχει κοινωνικός έλεγχος. Δεν μπορείς να κάνεις σα χαζό! Πρέπει να είμαι ψιλο-ακίνητη, ψιλο-συγκεντρωμένη... Αν κοιτάς συνέχεια αλλού, θα ενοχλήσεις. Οπότε κατά κάποιο τρόπο η συνθήκη της

βιβλιοθήκης είναι «εσύ προσηλωμένος στο κείμενο». Κατά κάποιο τρόπο με περιορίζει αυτό. Όπως οι αποδεκτοί ήχοι στη βιβλιοθήκη δεν είναι ούτε τακούνια, είναι ας πούμε το πληκτρολόγιο, κάποιος να πληκτρολογεί... είναι ενοχλητικό αλλά είναι ένας αποδεκτός ήχος... Η αποδεκτή στάση στη βιβλιοθήκη είναι το να κάθεται να διαβάζεις. Επίσης, στη βιβλιοθήκη αισθάνομαι μια αλληλεγγύη, ότι υπάρχουνε και άλλοι οι οποίοι χρειάζεται να κάνουν ό, τι εγώ τώρα. Δηλαδή το κάνω κατά κάποιο τρόπο όταν θέλω να πειθαρχήσω τον εαυτό μου και δυσκολεύομαι. Όμως ποτέ δεν έχω τελειώσει ένα πρότζεκτ στη βιβλιοθήκη... πάω για λίγο μέχρι να συγκεντρωθώ και μετά συνεχίζω στο σπίτι.

Σε μία μάλλον αντίθετη εκτίμηση των ίδιων χαρακτηριστικών προχωρά ο Θωμάς, τριάντα πέντε χρονών, δημοσιογράφος που ζει στην Αθήνα. Η συλλογικότητα της ανάγνωσης, η επικέντρωση στο βιβλίο και η εναλλαγή αναγνωσμάτων σε κάτι περισσότερο ψυχαγωγικό είναι αιτίες που τον απομακρύνουν από τον χώρο μίας βιβλιοθήκης. Η ελευθερία της ανάγνωσης είναι αυτό που επιδιώκει για αυτό και προτιμάει ένα πιο χαλαρό περιβάλλον όπου ο ίδιος ρυθμίζει την ανάγνωσή του στους ρυθμούς που επιθυμεί.

Προτιμώ να πάω σε καφετέρια, και να μην είμαι σε περιβάλλον όπου όλοι διαβάζουν ή που το διάβασμα είναι επιτακτικό – τι άλλο να κάνεις στη βιβλιοθήκη θα διαβάσεις, ενώ στην καφετέρια μπορώ να το αφήσω το βιβλίο κάτω και να συνεχίσω να πίνω τον καφέ μου ή να χαζεύω ή να κάτσω να σημειώσω κάτι ή να βγάλω αθλητική εφημερίδα που στη βιβλιοθήκη μπορεί να φαινότανε παράξενο. (Θωμάς)

5. Αναγνώσεις εν κινήσει

Η μορφή του βιβλίου διευκολύνει τη μεταφορά του ως αντικειμένου και ενισχύει τις «μετατοπίσεις» της ανάγνωσης. Όπως σημειώνει η Ζωή *«θες ας πούμε να πας στο πάρκο, να είσαι κάπου χύμα, να είσαι στο λεωφορείο, να είσαι κλεφτά στη δουλειά... όπου και να βρίσκεσαι μπορείς να το ανοίξεις»*. Έτσι, η ανάγνωση εντοπίζεται σε διαφορετικούς τόπους σε μία προσπάθεια των πληροφορητών/τριών να αποφύγουν ρυθμίσεις του κοινωνικού περιβάλλοντος, σε μία αναζήτηση «περισσότερης» απόλαυσης όσο και σε μία προσπάθεια εκμετάλλευσης «κενών» χρόνων κατά τη διάρκεια της μέρας. Μπορούμε να πούμε ότι η ανάγνωση δεν έχει τόπο. «Ο τόπος του αναγνώστη δεν είναι εδώ ή εκεί, τούτος ή ο άλλος αλλά ούτε ο ένας ούτε ο άλλος, μέσα και συγχρόνως έξω» (Ντε Σερτώ, 2010, σ. 385).

Παίρνω το ποδήλατο συνήθως και πάω κάπου και διαβάζω... σε πάρκα ή στη θάλασσα. Αλλά πάντα έχω ένα βιβλίο μαζί μου – όπου και να πάω στην τσάντα έχω ένα βιβλίο. Αυτή τη στιγμή έχω μαζί μου «Βίνκελμαν ή Το Πεπρωμένο» του Ίσαρη.

Δηλαδή νομίζω ότι τα τελευταία δέκα χρόνια δεν υπάρχει μέρα που να μην έχω ένα βιβλίο στην τσάντα μου. Είναι για μένα κάτι σαν σύντροφος. Επειδή περπατάω πολύ και έχω μεγάλα κενά, και περνάω πολλές ώρες της μέρας μου εκτός σπιτιού, επειδή ακόμα δεν έχω φτάσει στον «οίκο» και τρέχω να σωθώ απ' τον εαυτό μου είμαι πολύ στη γύρα οπότε έχω πάντα ένα βιβλίο μαζί... (Τάσος, τριάντα τεσσάρων ετών, συγγραφέας, δουλεύει ως υπάλληλος σε θέατρο)

Τα βιβλία μπαίνουν σε τσάντες φεύγοντας για ένα προορισμό και αν δεν ανοιχτούν κατά τη διαδρομή, στο μετρό ή το λεωφορείο, ανοίγονται σε καφέ που παίζουν ήρεμη μουσική, σε παγκάκια και πάρκα. Αρκετοί από τους/τις πληροφορητές/-τριες μου μίλησαν επίσης, για το διάβασμα στην παραλία, στο πλαίσιο διακοπών. Ωστόσο, η Άννα, είκοσι εννέα ετών που διαμένει στην Αθήνα, αλλά έχει ως προσωρινή βάση την Κοζάνη καθώς εργάζεται ως συμβασιούχος αρχαιολόγος, θέτει πολύ εύστοχα την αστικότητα της αναγνωστικής εμπειρίας που παρακάτω θα δούμε να τοποθετείται στις δημόσιες συγκοινωνίες. Αυτού του τύπου η ανάγνωση σχετίζεται άμεσα με τα «μεγάλα κενά» που αναφέρει ο Τάσος, αντί για την εγγύτητα των αποστάσεων μίας επαρχιακής πόλης.

Σε μια μεγάλη πόλη νιώθω έχεις αυτό το στερεότυπο ή την εικόνα, ότι βγαίνεις σε έναν καφέ θα πιείς καπουτσίνο και θα διαβάζεις και θα ακούγεται τζαζ από πίσω και κάτι τέτοια... εντάξει. Ή παλιά στη Θεσσαλονίκη είχα μια ώρα κενό και πήγαινα και διάβαζα και μετά είχα μάθημα... ή άμα κάτσω να περιμένω κάποιον, άμα έχω κενό... Εδώ – στην Κοζάνη όχι τόσο, γιατί δεν υπάρχουνε τέτοια κενά! Όλα είναι δίπλα. Αλλά στην Αθήνα πάντα έχω ένα βιβλίο στην τσάντα...

Εκτός από τις ανταλλαγές βιβλίων και τη δράση που εντοπίζεται στη σφαίρα του σπιτιού, η Φωτεινή μου λέει ότι με το σύντροφό της πολλές φορές αναζητούν ένα «ωραίο μέρος για διάβασμα». Φαίνεται αρκετά περίπλοκο να συγκεντρωθούν όλα τα κριτήρια που συνθέτουν αυτό το «ωραίο μέρος». Όταν τη ρωτάω «πώς θα ήταν ένα ωραίο μέρος για να διαβάσεις;» μου δίνει την παρακάτω περιγραφή:

Ένα καφέ ήσυχο με χαλαρή μουσική που ο κόσμος που μαζεύει να είναι ήσυχος, να μη γίνεται πανικός. Δηλαδή δίπλα σου να μην είναι μια παρέα δεκαπέντε ατόμων που συζητάνε πολιτικά και βρίζονται... έχεις πάει ας πούμε στο «Ζώγια: Βιβλίο, Τσάι και Συμπάθεια»; Ε, πώς είναι εκεί, αλλά να μην είναι τόσο ξενέρωτος ο χώρος, να σ' αρέσει! Να επιτρέπεται το κάπνισμα οπωσδήποτε.

Τα κριτήρια του Άρη διαφοροποιούνται για ένα ιδανικό μέρος για ανάγνωση, με τη θέα να επιτείνει την απόλαυση, όπως σημειώθηκε και από άλλους/-ες πληροφορητές/-τριες, ενώ ο Κυριάκος έχει καταλήξει σε συγκεκριμένα καφέ χρίζοντάς τα «στέκια ανάγνωσης».

Μ' αρέσει να διαβάζω σε ωραία μέρη με ωραία θέα. Αυτό για να μη νιώθω ότι εκείνη την ώρα χάνω κάτι άλλο απ' τη ζωή μου. Δηλαδή, μ' αρέσει να διαβάζω στην ταράτσα. Με φόντο το ηλιοβασίλεμα, τέτοια... (Άρης)

Πηγαίνω σε καφέ, και σε συγκεκριμένα καφέ. Στη Θεσσαλονίκη είναι το «Palermo» ας πούμε που πάω και διαβάζω εκεί, ή στον «Λοξία». (Κυριάκος)

Αρκετοί πληροφορητές μίλησαν για ανάγνωση στις δημόσιες συγκοινωνίες κατά τη διάρκεια της μετακίνησής τους μέσα στην πόλη αλλά και για πιο μεγάλες αποστάσεις. Η σφαίρα των δημόσιων μεταφορών «είναι σήμερα ο κατεξοχόν χώρος όπου η έννοια δημόσιος χώρος διατηρεί ένα νόημα. Δημόσιος χώρος ως ο χώρος όπου όλος ο κόσμος διασταυρώνεται με όλο τον κόσμο, αλλά χώρος όπου διαμορφώνεται η κοινή γνώμη, ταυτίζεται σε μεγάλο βαθμό με τον χώρο των δημόσιων μεταφορών» (Auge, 2009, σ. 50). Το μετρό –και κατ' επέκταση οι δημόσιες μεταφορές– βρίθει «λεπτομερειών» που απευθύνονται στους άλλους, και αποτελεί ταυτόχρονα ένα ολικό κοινωνικό φαινόμενο και ένα μυθιστορηματικό κοίτασμα (ό.π.: 74).

Πιο πολύ έξω διαβάζω στο μετρό και στο λεωφορείο. Σε καφέ δεν πάω, γιατί νομίζω ότι στην Ελλάδα σε θεωρούν, ας πούμε, ψώνιο, αν το κάνεις. Νομίζω έξω όσο έχω δει είναι πολύ συνηθισμένο, πολύ δηλαδή και σε μετρό και σε καφέ πάρα πολύ.. Στην Ελλάδα το είχα κάνει δυο-τρεις φορές και δεν ξέρω με κοιτούσαν περίεργα... και θεωρείσαι έτσι εκκεντρικός, φαιδρός, γκέι αν είσαι άντρας... νομίζω ότι δεν είναι ανεκτικοί. (Σπύρος, τριάντα πέντε, παντρεμένος με τη Νεφέλη, έχουν μία κόρη και ζουν στην Αθήνα και στο Παρίσι).

Σπάνια διαβάζω σπίτι, διαβάζω πολύ συχνά όταν είμαι σε διαδρομές. Από δημόσια υπηρεσία μέχρι ταξίδι με τρένο, με αεροπλάνο...και μου αρέσει πολύ γιατί έχω κάτι σταθερό μπροστά μου και όλα γύρω κινούνται. Μ' αρέσει πάρα πολύ αυτό. Ή στο τρένο, 504 αμαξοστοιχία... τρελαίνομαι για φάση τρένο, ούτε καν σε πλοίο, σε τρένο! Είναι ο ρυθμός, το παράθυρο, το τούκου-τούκου... η εναλλαγή των τοπίων, το ότι δε φυσάει όπως στο πλοίο... (Σαβίνα, τριάντα ετών, δημοσιογράφος, δουλεύει για το Φεστιβάλ Θεσσαλονίκης και μένει μόνιμα στην Αθήνα).

Για την Έλλη η ανάγνωση στο μετρό είναι τακτικό φαινόμενο που γίνεται σε καθημερινή βάση στον δρόμο για τη δουλειά από την ανατολική Αττική προς το κέντρο της Αθήνας. Ο χώρος αλλά

και οι μετεπιβιβάσεις έχουν διαμορφώσει συγκεκριμένες αναγνωστικές πρακτικές που περιγράφει στη συνέχεια.

Μ' αρέσει να ολοκληρώνω ένα κεφάλαιο. Όταν πιάσω το βιβλίο, δε θέλω να αφήσω το κεφάλαιο στη μέση... Και γι' αυτό βλέπω σε ποια στάση είμαι, αν είμαι πολύ κοντά δεν ξεκινάω το επόμενο. Ή επίσης, κάποιες φορές υπάρχει ένα διάστημα στο κείμενο που είναι σα να τελειώνει η μία ιστορία και μετά ξεκινά μια επόμενη... έχει ένα μικρό κενό, χωρίς να αλλάζει κεφάλαιο. Σ' αυτό μπορεί να σταματήσω μερικές φορές όταν είναι ανάγκη... Αλλιώς δε θα σταματήσω. Επειδή περνάω πολύ χρόνο στο μετρό, για μένα είναι μια διέξοδος. Αξιοποιώ έναν κενό χρόνο διαβάζοντας – κάτι το οποίο με αποστασιοποιεί από τον χώρο στον οποίο βρίσκομαι. (Έλλη)

Λόγω των υψηλών γνωστικών απαιτήσεων της ανάγνωσης, ειδικά σε ένα δυναμικό κοινωνικό περιβάλλον όπως είναι η πόλη της Αθήνας για την οποία μιλά η Έλλη, οι αναγνώστες/τριες χρειάζεται να δημιουργήσουν χώρους στους οποίους η ιδιωτική εργασία μπορεί να προχωρήσει σχετικά απρόσκοπτα. Ο Goffman προσφέρει τον όρο «χώρος χρήσης» (use space) για να ορίσει την περιοχή που δημιουργείται γύρω από μια δραστηριότητα του σώματος, Αυτός ο χώρος χρήσης πρέπει να προστατευτεί από την εισβολή άλλων. Όμως τα όρια που δημιουργεί ο αναγνώστης είναι διαπερατά, όπως φαίνεται, εφόσον οι διαδικασίες αλληλεπίδρασης με τους άλλους και με τον κοινωνικό χώρο συνεχίζουν να υφίστανται. Ο λόγος των αναγνωστών/τριών αναδεικνύει πώς διαπραγματεύονται αυτά τα ρευστά όρια και πώς υπερασπίζονται τους χώρους ανάγνωσης καθώς υπερασπίζονται το δικαίωμά τους στην εσωτερικότητα, σε μια εμπειρία που δεν επιθυμούν να επιβλέπεται (Laughlin, 2016, σ. 118-119).

6. Βιβλιοπωλεία, αισθήσεις, λαθραναγνώσεις

«Όπως η θάλασσα έτσι και το βιβλίο είναι μια εξαιρετική μορφή του ανοικτού» λέει ο Recalcati (2022, σ. 16). Συνδέοντας αυτόν τον εύστοχο παραλληλισμό με την παρούσα προσέγγιση, το βιβλίο είναι ένα ιδιάζον αντικείμενο που κινείται στα όρια μεταξύ υλικού και διανοητικού στοιχείου. Αποτελεί αντικείμενο περιεκτικό και με ιδιαιτερότητες ενώ μία πρόσληψή του ως «ενιαίο» παραλείπει σημαντικές πτυχές του τι συμβαίνει όταν οι άνθρωποι το χρησιμοποιούν (Σιδηροπούλου, 2015). Την ίδια στιγμή το βιβλίο είναι και ένα προϊόν που έχει, συνήθως, εμπορική αξία. Το πιο αντιπροσωπευτικό μέρος όπου γίνεται η εμπορική συναλλαγή βιβλίων είναι τα βιβλιοπωλεία. Στη συνέχεια θα δούμε πώς αντιστρέφονται οι όροι με τακτικές και εναλλακτικές χρήσεις των βιβλίων-εμπορευμάτων προς όφελος της ανάγνωσης. Στην ίδια γραμμή με το λόγο περί αισθήσεων, ο Nancy υπερασπίζεται το βιβλιοπωλείο εν είδει αρωματοπωλείου ή ζαχαροπλαστείου: ένα εργαστήριο αρωμάτων και γεύσεων μέσω του

οποίου κάτι σαν άρωμα διανέμεται, κατανέμεται, γίνεται αισθητό. Επισημαίνει το γεγονός ότι ο αναγνώστης σε ένα βιβλιοπωλείο δεν διαβάζει, ή διαβάζει πολύ λίγο, αλλά ξεφυλλίζει, αναζητά και ψηλαφεί τον δρόμο του. Δεν καταβροχθίζει, αλλά δοκιμάζει, εισπνέει, μυρίζει (Nancy, 2009, σ. 38). Ακόμα και μόνο μέσω της αφής τα βιβλία επικοινωνούν με συγκεκριμένες εντυπώσεις του αναγνώστη: το βάρος, την υφή, ή την ευλυγισία με τα οποία κάποιος θεωρεί ότι μπορεί να διακρίνει τις διακυμάνσεις μιας φωνής (Nancy, 2009, σ. 38-40). Στο ίδιο κλίμα ο Eco (2012, σ. 314) διερωτάται ποιος από μας δεν έχει οσφρανθεί τη μυρωδιά των βιβλίων στα ράφια μεγάλων βιβλιοπωλείων. Ακόμα κι αν δεν ανήκουν σε μας είναι φορές που χαζεύουμε τα βιβλία με την ελπίδα ότι θα «αντλήσουμε» γνώση από όλα αυτά που δεν έχουμε διαβάσει και είναι γεμάτα με υποσχέσεις.

Παλιότερα, σε μία κουβέντα που είχα με μία γνωστή για το ποια βιβλιοπωλεία στο κέντρο της Αθήνας είναι πιο οικονομικά μου αποκάλυψε κάτι που μου έκανε ιδιαίτερη εντύπωση. Ότι κατά κάποιο τρόπο χρησιμοποιεί τα βιβλιοπωλεία σαν δανειστικές βιβλιοθήκες. Έτσι, καθώς «διαβάζει γρήγορα» αγοράζει μερικά βιβλία, τα ολοκληρώνει σε σύντομο χρόνο και τα επιστρέφει. Μου επισήμανε ότι κατά την ανάγνωσή της είναι ιδιαίτερα προσεκτική να μη τα φθείρει (π.χ. δεν τα ανοίγει πολύ κτλ). Σε διάστημα ενός μήνα –όσο λέει η απόδειξη ότι είναι το διάστημα που μπορείς να τα κρατήσεις σε περίπτωση αλλαγής– επιστρέφει στο βιβλιοπωλείο και τα αλλάζει με κάποια άλλα. Συνήθως δεν τα επιστρέφει όλα, κρατάει κάποια, αλλά ακόμα αν δεν θέλει κανένα μπορεί να κάνει επιστροφή χρημάτων. Πρόκειται για μία αναγνωστική πρακτική που σε κάθε περίπτωση αξιοποιεί το νόμιμο πλαίσιο. Έχοντας ακούσει την πρακτική αυτή παλιότερα, η πρακτική της Ευγενίας που είναι πάνω από τριάντα, παντρεμένη, ζει και εργάζεται σε ιδιωτικό σχολείο της Αθήνας ως καθηγήτρια Κλασικής Φιλολογίας, μου φάνηκε ότι στεκόταν στον αντίποδα. Σε μία άλλη λογική που αναδεικνύει τα βιβλιοπωλεία σαν χώρους ανάγνωσης λέει:

Στο Λονδίνο μ' άρεσε να διαβάζω σε bookshops. Καμιά φορά καθόμουν και διάβαζα.

Τα αγόραζα και καθόμουν και διάβαζα. Ήταν και μια καλή αρχή.

Στο ίδιο πλαίσιο, ο Βίκτωρας και η Σαβίνα συνδυάζουν, ενδεχομένως σε πιο ήπια μορφή, τις παραπάνω λογικές με την πρακτική της «λαθρανάγνωσης», όπως ο ίδιος ο Βίκτωρας ονομάζει. Η Σαβίνα εντοπίζει πότε άρχισε αυτή η πρακτική:

Μπορώ να περάσω χρόνο σε βιβλιοπωλείο όχι για να αγοράσω αλλά για να διαβάσω. Οπότε πολύ συχνά διαβάζω ποίηση στο πόδι. Παλιά όταν ήμουν μαθήτρια πήγαινα σε βιβλιοπωλεία και επειδή δεν είχα λεφτά για να αγοράσω, δεν είχα καθόλου λεφτά τότε γιατί δεν είχα εισόδημα, καθόμουν και διάβαζα ολόκληρα βιβλία σε συνέχειες.

Ο Βίκτωρας κατά τη διάρκεια της «λαθραίας ανάγνωσης» ενός εμπορεύματος που δεν έχει ακόμα αποφασίσει αν θα πληρώσει το αντίτιμο, διατηρεί τη συναίσθηση ότι πρόκειται για εμπόρευμα. Αλλά δεν είναι μόνο η εμπορική συναλλαγή, αυτή που τον δεσμεύει όσο η συναισθηματική ανάγκη.

Δεν μπορώ να το κάνω πολύ ώρα. Μπορώ να ανοίξω ένα βιβλίο σε κανα βιβλιοπωλείο αλλά δεν μπορώ να το κάνω πολύ ώρα, νιώθω ένα άγχος ότι κάτι πρέπει να γίνει με αυτό. Ήτάξει το διαβάζεις αλλά τι; Θα το πάρεις; Θα το αφήσεις; Τι θα το κάνεις;

7. Συζήτηση

Η έρευνα προσφέρει στη σύνθεση μιας συνολικής εικόνας της υποκειμενικής και βιωματικής δραστηριότητας της ανάγνωσης. Παρέχει επίσης σημαντικές γνώσεις σχετικά με την αμφισβήτηση κυρίαρχων αναγνώσεων, όπως εκφράζονται συνήθως από τις δημόσιες βιβλιοθήκες. Όπως αναδείχθηκε από την έρευνα οι περισσότεροι αναγνώστες/τριες προτιμούν ελευθερία κινήσεων και χώρους που επιτρέπουν την άσκηση προσωπικών πρακτικών σε σχέση με την ανάγνωση. Άλλοι στρέφονται σε «ανυπότακτες» μορφές ανάγνωσης, αντιστρέφοντας και χρησιμοποιώντας πολλές φορές θεσμούς προς όφελός τους.

Οι περισσότεροι αναγνώστες/τριες προτιμούν ελευθερία κινήσεων και χώρους που επιτρέπουν την άσκηση προσωπικών πρακτικών σε σχέση με την ανάγνωση. Άλλοι στρέφονται σε «ανυπότακτες» μορφές ανάγνωσης, αντιστρέφοντας και χρησιμοποιώντας πολλές φορές θεσμούς προς όφελός τους.

Μέσα από τα λόγια των αναγνωστών/τριών αποτυπώνεται ως ένα βαθμό η επικοινωνία της ιδιωτικής σφαίρας –όπου οι πληροφορητές/τριες συλλέγουν και διατηρούν τα βιβλία τους– με τον συχνά δημόσιο χώρο της ανάγνωσης επέτρεψε να αναδειχθούν σημεία συνοχής μεταξύ βιβλίων, αναγνωστών και αναγνωστικής δραστηριότητας υπό το πρίσμα του χώρου. Περνώντας από τις συλλογές που οριοθετούν τον ιδιωτικό χώρο σε άλλους χώρους ανάγνωσης διακρίνεται η αμφισβήτηση κυρίαρχων αναγνώσεων όπως εκφράζονται συνήθως από τις δημόσιες βιβλιοθήκες. Οι περισσότεροι προτιμούν ελευθερία κινήσεων και χώρους που επιτρέπουν την

άσκηση προσωπικών πρακτικών. Άλλοι στρέφονται σε «ανυπότακτες» μορφές ανάγνωσης, αντιστρέφοντας και χρησιμοποιώντας πολλές φορές θεσμούς προς όφελός τους.

Η έρευνα ακολούθησε την πορεία βιβλίων και αναγνώσεων σε μία σειρά τόπων, διαδρομών, χώρων που συνοδεύονται από δράσεις και πρακτικές και αφορούν άμεσα τη διάσταση της σωματικότητας της ανάγνωσης. Η “χαρτογράφηση” αποτυπώνει την επικοινωνία της ιδιωτικής σφαίρας –όπου οι πληροφορητές/-τριες συλλέγουν και διατηρούν τα βιβλία τους– με τον συχνά δημόσιο χώρο της ανάγνωσης. Αυτή τη λογική επιτρέπει να αναδειχθούν σημεία μιας βαθύτερης σύνδεσης μεταξύ βιβλίων, αναγνωστών και αναγνωστικής δραστηριότητας υπό το πρίσμα του χώρου. Οι πρακτικές αυτές βοηθούν να διαταραχθούν κυρίαρχες αναπαραστάσεις. Και είναι ακριβώς οι νοηματοδοτήσεις των πληροφορητών/τριών σχετικά με τον χώρο που κάνουν ακόμα περισσότερο ευκρινές ότι η ανάγνωση δεν είναι μόνο το διάβασμα, δεν είναι μόνο «ένα πράγμα» αυτό που γίνεται κατά τη διάρκεια της ανάγνωσης, αλλά πολλαπλές παράλληλες δράσεις, γεγονός που διευρύνει την έννοια της πληθυντικότητας της ανάγνωσης.

Ένα πεδίο που θα μπορούσε επίσης να διερευνηθεί εθνογραφικά είναι η αλλαγή των σύγχρονων βιβλιοθηκών προς ένα περισσότερο «φιλόξενο» περιβάλλον και η σταδιακή μετατροπή τους από χώρους ανάγνωσης βιβλίων σε χώρους ανοιχτούς σε διαφορετικές μορφές ανάγνωσης και αναγνωσμάτων πλαισιωμένες από ατμόσφαιρα ελευθερίας. Περαιτέρω

μελέτες στην ίδια κατεύθυνση θα μπορούσαν να παρέχουν μια ισχυρή πρόκληση προς τους κυρίαρχους, δεδομένους και μάλλον απλουστευμένους λόγους περί ανάγνωσης, και να υποστηρίξει την αναγνώριση ενός ευρύτατου φάσματος αναγνώσεων στο πλαίσιο μιας εκπαιδευτικής και κοινωνικής πολιτικής. Μια ακόμα προέκταση της μελέτης θα μπορούσε να αφορά τις ψηφιακές

Οι νοηματοδοτήσεις των αναγνωστών/τριων σχετικά με τον χώρο κάνουν ακόμα περισσότερο ευκρινές ότι η ανάγνωση δεν είναι μόνο το διάβασμα. Δεν είναι μόνο «ένα πράγμα» αυτό που γίνεται κατά τη διάρκεια της ανάγνωσης, αλλά πολλαπλές παράλληλες δράσεις, γεγονός που διευρύνει την έννοια της πληθυντικότητας της ανάγνωσης.

αναγνώσεις και αναγνώσματα σε σχέση με το χώρο. Ιδιαίτερο ενδιαφέρον παρουσιάζει το να εξετάσει κανείς πώς τα ψηφιακά περιβάλλοντα, όπως τα ηλεκτρονικά βιβλία και τα μέσα κοινωνικής δικτύωσης, διαμορφώνουν τις πρακτικές ανάγνωσης και τις κοινές αλληλεπιδράσεις μεταξύ των αναγνωστών, αποκαλύπτοντας την εξελισσόμενη φύση της ανάγνωσης στην ψηφιακή εποχή υπό το πρίσμα μιας επαυξημένης αντίληψης του χώρου. Περαιτέρω προοπτική για διεύρυνση της έρευνας αποτελεί η εστίαση στην πολυτροπική/

πολυαισθητηριακή ανάγνωση. Εθνογραφικές προσεγγίσεις, όπως αυτή που υιοθετήθηκε στην παρούσα έρευνα, θα πρόσφεραν σημαντικά στην ανάδειξη της συμπεριληπτικής εμπειρίας ενός φάσματος αναγνώσεων που παραμένουν αφανείς όπως αυτές των αναγνωστών με οπτικές βλάβες. Μια πιθανή κατεύθυνση είναι η μελέτη διαφόρων πρακτικών ανάγνωσης που εστιάζουν στα απτικά και ηχητικά βιβλία και πώς οι αναγνώστες ενσωματώνουν τα αναγνώσματα αυτού του είδους σε διαφορετικούς χώρους ανάγνωσης. Αυτές οι προτάσεις αποσκοπούν στο να προωθήσουν μια βαθύτερη κατανόηση του θέματος και να εμπνεύσουν περαιτέρω επιστημονική ενασχόληση με το θέμα.

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Intercultural Cinema to Foster Education for Sustainable Development and Global Citizenship: a Didactic Case Study

Cine intercultural para fomentar la educación para el desarrollo sostenible y la ciudadanía global: un estudio de caso didáctico

Cinema intercultural per fomentar l'educació per al desenvolupament sostenible i la ciutadania global: un estudi de cas didàctic

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Abstract

As societies evolve, a new global context is rising which demands respect for human rights and a new model for coexistence as promoted and defended by the 2030 Agenda from the United Nations. These necessary new models, which include Education for Sustainable Development and Global Citizenship, can be learnt through films since some of these visual materials constitute a useful training tool when related to the acquisition of values.

This article is aimed at evidencing how the introduction of intercultural cinema as a pedagogical tool to learn about unknown social issues, foreign cultures and people enhances student's communication, cooperative skills and motivation. To accomplish this objective a didactic experience shared by Secondary Education Students shall be presented. As a result, an increase in student's motivation to learn more about mixed opinions, languages, cultures, actions and reactions has been observed.

Key words: ESL, cinema for education purposes, Education for Sustainable Development and Global Citizenship, communicative competence, interculturality.

Resumen

A medida que las sociedades evolucionan, surge un nuevo contexto global que exige el respeto de los Derechos Humanos y un nuevo modelo de convivencia como el que promueve y defiende la Agenda 2030 de Naciones Unidas. Estos nuevos modelos necesarios, que integran la Educación para el Desarrollo Sostenible y la Ciudadanía Global, se pueden asimilar a través del cine, ya que algunos de estos materiales audiovisuales constituyen una herramienta de formación útil cuando se enfoca en la adquisición de valores.

Este artículo tiene como objetivo evidenciar cómo la introducción del cine intercultural como herramienta pedagógica para aprender sobre temas sociales desconocidos, culturas y personas extranjeras mejora la comunicación, las habilidades cooperativas y la motivación del estudiantado. Para lograr este objetivo se presentará una experiencia didáctica compartida por estudiantes de Educación Secundaria. Como resultado, se ha observado un aumento en la motivación de los estudiantes para aprender más sobre opiniones, idiomas, culturas, acciones y reacciones encontradas.

Palabras clave: inglés como segunda lengua, cine con fines educativos, Educación para el Desarrollo Sostenible y la Ciudadanía Global, competencia comunicativa, interculturalidad.

Resum

A mesura que les societats evolucionen, sorgeix un nou context global que exigeix el respecte dels drets humans i un nou model de convivència com el que promou i defensa l'Agenda 2030 de les Nacions Unides. Aquests nous models necessaris, que integren l'Educació per al Desenvolupament Sostenible i la Ciutadania Global, es poden assimilar a través del cinema, ja que alguns materials audiovisuals constitueixen una eina de formació útil quan s'enfoca en l'adquisició de valors.

Aquest article té com a objectiu evidenciar com la introducció del cinema intercultural com a eina pedagògica per aprendre sobre temes socials desconeguts, cultures i persones estrangeres millora la comunicació, les habilitats cooperatives i la motivació dels estudiants. Per assolir aquest objectiu, es presentarà una experiència didàctica compartida per estudiants d'Educació Secundària. Com a resultat, s'ha observat un augment en la motivació dels estudiants per aprendre més sobre opinions, idiomes, cultures, accions i reaccions trobades.

Paraules clau: anglès com a segona llengua, cinema amb finalitats educatives, Educació per al Desenvolupament Sostenible i la Ciutadania Global, competència comunicativa, interculturalitat.

1. Introduction

Taking direct action is the sole means of contributing to the creation of a more equitable, selfless, and fair world with reduced discrimination. Meaningful changes in society necessitate targeted interventions, and altering people's perceptions is key to transforming reality, a goal achievable through education (Banks, 2015). Despite various groups proposing novel educational approaches in response to the evolving environment, the evolution of education within schools remains imperceptible.

To enhance literary and linguistic education, there is a need to champion educational innovation and research in Education for Sustainable Development and Global Citizenship. This paper advocates for assigning a new and crucial role to formal education in fostering individual development and concurrently enhancing global human relations. Embracing cultural differences can have positive outcomes, fostering either positive relationships or detachment based on the adopted educational perspective, extending beyond the community's boundaries (Bartolomé and Cabrera, 2000).

The improvement of language skills in the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom, coupled with the incorporation of Global Citizenship education through films in the curriculum, empowers young people to understand others, appreciate diversity, endorse shared values, grasp human rights, and cultivate cooperation and responsible action skills (Aguado, 2005). This, in turn, promotes equality of opportunities within the classroom.

The central aim of this proposal is twofold: firstly, to cultivate Education for Sustainable Development and Global Citizenship through collaborative activities in English as a Second Language (ESL), and secondly, to utilize Intercultural Cinema as the primary tool for addressing the aforementioned issues. The film *Diamantes Negros* (Alcantud, 2013) serves as the principal instrument to achieve these objectives.

2. Education for Sustainable Development and Global Citizenship fostered by Intercultural Cinema through cooperative activities in ESL

Communicative challenges, that we are not always prepared to take, arise from the differences among people (Hymes, 1972). This inability is often caused by attitudes of ignorance or rejection of cultural differences (Byram, 2000), and the educational framework needs to ensure its students acquire such basic skills as what separates us from other species: communication. Moreover, within all the nuances involved in communication, the relevance of humans being different from one another must be highlighted; that is, what intercultural communication emphasises. Competence to communicate appreciation for cultural differences means being able to relate symmetrically to people of other races, genders, backgrounds, etc. (Martínez Usarralde, 2011 and 2015).

Still, the current situation is not limited to an intercultural reality, it goes beyond. Nowadays, perceptions about borders have resulted in two opposing interpretations. One could say that borders are blurring, should we consider the idea of Globalisation, leading to the belief that people are becoming citizens of the world (Boni, 2011). As opposed to this interpretation, it can

be argued that borders are nowadays becoming tighter, rather than blurred, especially in the light of the refugee crisis.

In both ways, it is important to know how to behave among and towards people of different origins and cultures, and to change the distorted perception we have opening our eyes to see the environment as a whole (Banks, 2015). Education for “global perception” means learning about nations, cultures, and civilizations, including the globalised pluralistic European society and other societies, with a focus on understanding how these are all interconnected and how they change, and on the individual’s responsibility in this enriching social development process as we wish for its sustainability (Nguyen, 2015). In Kerr’s words, back from the pre-third era of globalisation (1979, 110-111):

Educating [...] to be citizens of the world, as well as of city, state, and nation, involves three areas of instruction: (1) special skills, (2) special knowledge, and (3) cross-cultural awareness. Only one of these, the knowledge area, means changes in, or additions to, the curriculum. The others involve, instead, kinds of thinking that can and should become a part of the whole educational process, not separate subjects (Abdi, Shultz & Pillay, 2015; Nguyen; 2015 y Samek, 2015).

Once the importance of education for the diffusion of intercultural values, and sustainable development and global citizenship has been established, the best way to address these issues must be considered. Cinema has been coming to the fore and has a significant socialising impact (Losada Aldrey, 2009). It can be an essential resource in education. As McLuhan (1960) said in *Classroom without Walls*, cinema complements knowledge and integrates ideas and languages. According to him, ‘whatever pleases teaches more effectively,’ introducing us both to the smallness of the elements making them important, and in the immense spaces making them accessible and endearing. Certainly, cinema entertains, distracts, and amuses and that is all many people seek in it (Berk, 2009). But not seeking does not mean not finding that films also instil ideas, influence people’s behaviour or make them identify themselves with certain values (Pereira, 2005). Its impact is greater because it never stops being attractive to its spectators. The taught contents should be assimilated and accompanied by a wide range of cognitive, emotional, procedural, and moral experiences. As stated by Blasco et al. (2015, 2-3):

Using movies in teaching is an effective way to reach people's affective domain, promote reflective attitudes, and link learning to experiences. Teaching with movies triggers that disclose emotions allows questions, expectations and dilemmas to arise for both learner and teacher. Movies provide a narrative model grounded in the learners' familiar world that is framed in emotions and images. Because they are familiar, evocative, and non-threatening, grounded in both imagery and emotion, movies are useful in teaching the human dimension required for developing as human beings and for building identity in young learners. For teachers, the movie experience helps also to confirm and clarify their role to bring new perspectives in teaching. The movie learning scenario allows teaching points to be made quickly and directly with specific scenes; facilitates the integration of emotions in the viewing experience; and helps the learners to understand and recognize immediately the main messages regarding attitudes and human values delivered by the movie characters. Fostering reflection stimulates discussion about the breadth of human experience and elicits profound conflicts and concerns learners have about their future professional roles and personal lives

Ours would be a curriculum based on and promoting intelligence, rationality, and human creativity. Surely, this poses a challenge to modern pedagogy, bridging the gaps between cultures and subjects in the context of an EFL class. Such a curriculum involves integrating the development of communication skills in foreign language teaching with the issues of interculturality and education for sustainable development and global citizenship (Engel, 2014). Cinema not only reaches the intelligence of people, but it also connects with their emotions, generates motivation, and facilitates their commitment to social building and engagement.

And intercultural realities of schools in globalised societies are also opportunities for cosmopolitan practices. We have already said that cinema can be a good tool, but to promote local and global connection there is a concept that is not to be underestimated: cooperation. According to Johnson & Johnson (1999, n. p.), cooperation "is working together to accomplish shared goals. Within cooperative situations, individuals seek outcomes that are beneficial to themselves and beneficial to all other group members".

The differences that separate us are also those that connect us (Dervin et al, 2012). This, in the school context, involves fostering support among students, their commitment to achieving a common goal and promoting equal opportunities.

3. Methodology

3.1. Context and sample of the research

Enhancing language education, sustainable development education, global citizenship, and interculturality is an ambitious endeavour, and proposing to do so through films adds a significant challenge in translating theory into practice. To address this challenge, the selected centre was IES Tierno Galván, situated in Montcada, within L'Horta Nord region, 8 km north of València. The population is predominantly Catalan-speaking, with a majority of students being bilingual in Catalan and Spanish.

The school comprises a diverse and pluralistic community, encompassing secondary and high school students, vocational students, teachers, administrative staff, and parents. The complexity of this community necessitates an organizational structure that enables the school's functioning and facilitates the attainment of goals outlined in the relevant curricula, aligning with the identity of this Secondary Education centre.

Currently, the IES has approximately 800 students, primarily from Montcada, with a noticeable rise in the number of foreign students over the past decade. While the students seem homogeneous in terms of origin, there is notable heterogeneity in terms of age, with Secondary Education students ranging from 11 to 18 years old and Vocational Training students spanning from 16-year-olds to adults. Although these groups don't attend the same classes, they share the same physical space.

Given the extensive data to be collected, a sample of students was necessary, with the chosen group being in *Bachillerato*, the two-year post-16 stage in Spain that precedes university studies. Despite their small number (17), these students, with a B2 English level, were more willing to participate and engage in the lesson. Their teacher permitted the use of mobile phones for research purposes in class. The students, accustomed to a rigid classroom arrangement, were reorganized to create a space focused on audiovisuals and small group collaboration, deviating from the traditional static rows, aiming to provide them with the opportunity to explore, learn, and stay motivated throughout various lessons.

4. Objectives

The primary aim of this lesson was to foster contemplation and cultivate critical thinking among second language (L2) students through a cross-curricular and multidisciplinary project. This project simultaneously imparts skills in reading audiovisual content. Cinema, functioning as an audiovisual medium, proves to be a valuable and stimulating educational instrument,

independent of its inherent worth as a distinct semiotic system. (Pujals & Romea, 2001, 139). Bousif and Sánchez (2021, 131-133) have demonstrated that films provide learners with diverse benefits which fall within three main dimensions: The linguistic dimension, the motivational dimension and the inter/cultural dimension.

The film *Diamantes Negros* was chosen for its likeliness to sensitise its spectators and to promote actions of social intervention in favour of education as a way of combating the exploitation of African children living in similar situations as the ones described in the story. We propose the following educational plan to heighten students' intercultural awareness while also acquiring and enhancing skills associated with intercultural education, understanding social identity within the context of Sustainable Development and Global Citizenship, and recognizing education as a universal right, all achieved through the utilization of cinema.

The primary goals of our educational intervention are outlined below:

Foundational Competencies

- Proficiency in communication in L2
- Civic and social proficiency
- Awareness and expression of cultural aspects

Cognitive Competences

- Recognizing specific needs
- Developing the four core skills (reading, listening, writing, and speaking) with a focus on communicative competence
- Understanding cinema in its critical dimension
- Acquiring knowledge about foreign countries and their people
- Recognizing how cultures may be misunderstood when viewed externally
- Applying critical thinking to articulate opinions on contemporary social issues and reality

Strategic and Instrumental Competencies

- Learning through audiovisual methods
- Learning through new technologies

Attitudinal Competencies

- Active participation in group activities
- Acting as a facilitator to assist fellow students
- Recognizing and challenging stereotypes about the African continent
- Gaining factual knowledge about the African continent
- Raising awareness of unfamiliar social situations

- Finding enjoyment in the learning process
- Effectively using personal devices (phone, laptop) for learning purposes
- Demonstrating creativity

Expected Outcomes

1. Understanding general features of the African continent
2. Questioning common stereotypes often held by Europeans about Africa
3. Mastering the skill of writing a film synopsis
4. Developing the ability to write an engaged article based on a real newspaper headline
5. Learning about cultural shock
6. Cultivating critical awareness

5. Chronogram

A strategy comprising four distinct sessions was devised to fulfil the previously outlined goals. Each session was structured to reinforce information from the preceding one, introduce new concepts, and briefly outline the methods to be utilized. This approach ensures that students comprehend the unit's progression. While they may not be aware of the ultimate objective due to the discovery-oriented nature of the activity, they are guided through the activities, establishing coherence in their understanding.

Sessions	Action Protocol
Session 1	Announcing the introduction of a new topic, approached uniquely through cinema, in the final ten minutes of the preceding class.
Session 2	Introducing the appropriate context and background essential for understanding subsequent activities, focusing on facts about the African continent and the questioning of ethnic or racial stereotypes.
Session 3	Engaging students in the exploration of cultural shock and child trafficking by viewing the trailer of the film <i>Diamantes Negros</i> along with some key scenes.
Session 4	Summarizing all the acquired concepts and encouraging reflection on the issue of child trafficking, students participate in a group writing activity where they compose newspaper articles based on provided headlines.

Table 1. Chronogram

6. Materials and Activities

Various resources and approaches exist for integrating videos into the classroom, serving as valuable starting points (Cobo Piñero, 2014). However, it can be challenging to find materials that delve into the breadth of themes explored in this paper. Consequently, a diverse range of materials has been utilized and generated, including:

- PowerPoint presentation: Providing factual information about Africa
- Video featuring a young girl sharing her experiences and impressions of African stereotypes
- Kahoot, a free game-based learning platform facilitating the creation and engagement in multiple-answer quizzes
- Video: Trailer of *Diamantes Negros* (Alcantud, 2013).
- Film: *Diamantes Negros*.

The focal point of this study revolves around the film *Diamantes Negros*, a societal critique addressing a challenging issue within the exclusive realm of football. The narrative unfolds in Mali, centring on Amadou and Moussa, two 15-year-old boys with disparate backgrounds. Moussa enjoys a comfortable life on the outskirts of the capital, free from financial hardships, while Amadou works in Bamako's market to support his ailing mother and two younger siblings. Despite their contrasting circumstances, they share a common dream: to play football. Both participate in a small team at a football academy in the capital, distinguishing themselves for their soccer prowess.

Following a local tournament, a European talent scout approaches them, offering assistance in realizing their dream of playing in Europe. While he pledges accommodation, the families are responsible for covering the trip and bureaucratic expenses. Upon arriving in Spain, they quickly discover that fulfilling their dream is more challenging than promised. They must confront issues such as competition, racism, cultural shock, loneliness, and a sense of helplessness. Additionally, they grapple with FIFA's transfer regulations about the protection of minors, emphasizing the illegality of signing underage foreign players.

- Activities
 - Listening activity (expected answer in italics) about African stereotypes, we will be using the video about stereotypes specified at the top of the list above.

Listening

This is Esi, she is in California, she used to live in Toronto, Canada but her family is originally from Ghana. She is going to talk about 5 different stereotypes about Africa.

These are:

1. *There are lions walking around.*
2. *African music is all drums and dancing like a 'wild' person.*
3. *Africans speak (mouth-sound) language.*
4. *Africa is a country.*
5. *Everyone in Africa is poor: no clothes, flies in their eyes, living in mud houses.*

But the truth is:

1. *There are lions at the zoo.*
2. *There are so many different sounds from all over different countries. They also have hip-hop, R&B, pop music, azonto...*
3. *They speak different languages. That one she doesn't know what it is.*
4. *Africa is a continent with loads of countries in it with different cultures.*
5. *There are beautiful hotels, fancy restaurants, luxurious events, wealthy people.*

Figure 1. Listening activity

- Speaking activity: synopsis of *Diamantes Negros*

Speaking

Film: _____

Synopsis:

Figure 2. Speaking activity

- Writing activity: newspaper headlines that will be used as prompts for students' articles

Young Africans, Lured by False Soccer Promises, Victims of Human Trafficking.

Alassane Diakite, the 'black diamond' fighting to protect children dream.

Al Bangura, former Premier League footballer 'was trafficked for sex'.

Diamantes Negros, a brave denunciation against child trafficking in football.

FIFA punishes Barça a year without signing because of irregularities in transfers of underaged players from abroad.

Figure 3. Writing activity

7. Results and Discussion

The section below presents, analyses and discusses the results obtained using the teacher's direct observation, quantitative and qualitative evaluation, and a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) analysis of the teaching proposal.

○ Direct Observation

Direct observation serves as a method to assess not only student-related elements but also factors related to the classroom environment (Moreno Sandoval, 2013). While acknowledging the debate around the objective nature of observation, its inherent subjectivity is considered a small risk. Despite this, the information gleaned allows teachers to uncover challenges in the acquisition and assimilation of knowledge. Furthermore, data collected after each session can aid in pre-empting obstacles in subsequent interventions. To facilitate this, information was documented in a chronological work diary during the implemented sessions.

The concept of working without a textbook initially captivates students, fostering motivation in their participation in an unconventional English class. However, this enthusiasm is short-lived as students, comfortable with the familiar, often find it challenging to embrace change despite their initial curiosity. Beyond the shift in materials, the mode of working transforms from individual focus to group collaboration. Encouraged to form groups with diverse levels, personalities, and abilities (cooperative learning), students discovered that the more evenly matched the groups, the greater the collective benefit. Initially resistant, they gradually found it easier and more natural to share, discuss, argue, and make decisions together.

Session by session, the progressive revelation of the lesson's direction kept students engaged, focused, and interested. The incorporation of African culture as the basis of the lesson evoked

varied reactions, appearing both exotic and unfamiliar to their daily lives. Nevertheless, the prospect of culminating their efforts in a film intrigued them, considering cinema primarily as a source of entertainment and relaxation. Though enthusiasm waned when they realized the film had a social theme, students began to appreciate it as they immersed themselves, sustaining their commitment to the task.

These observations suggest:

1. The effectiveness of cinema as an educational tool.
2. People's resistance to confronting the unknown.
3. Students' flexibility in accepting new proposals after comprehension.
4. The successful integration of new approaches (e.g., cooperative learning) following an adaptation period.
5. People's interest in learning, particularly when the means are engaging.
6. The potential for introducing students to intercultural values and cultivating global citizenship skills.
 - Quantitative Evaluation

To quantitatively evaluate the work carried out following the designed lesson plan, 17 students from a class in 2nd *Bachillerato* answered a questionnaire at the end of the lesson which comprised eight Yes/No questions and ten questions following the Likert scale. Each group of questions was analysed separately as they produced different information.

In the first place, the analysis focused on measuring the degree of involvement and empathy raised in students throughout the sessions. The results of the Yes/No questions were shown as percentages in a bar chart.

1. Would you like to watch the whole film?
2. Did you know about the trafficking of underage African football players?
3. Do you know any other kind of human trafficking?
4. Have you been abroad for at least a month?
5. Have you spent some time with people coming from other countries?
6. Have had you any contact with any African culture?
7. Are you interested in the way people live in other countries or continents?
8. Have you ever thought about living in another country for some time in the future?

The graph below presents the results of this analysis:

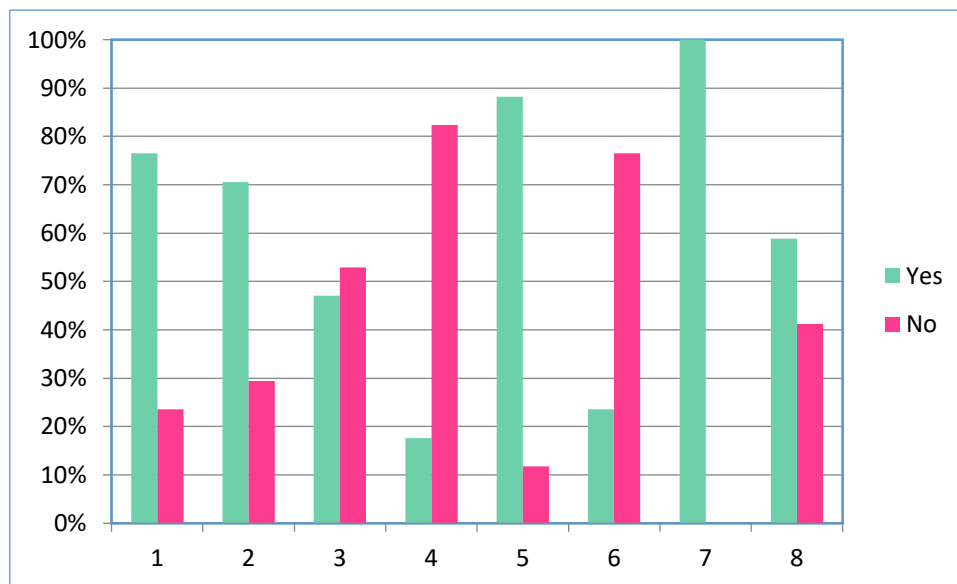


Figure 4. Yes/No Questions Analysis

In this chart, the following observations are made:

1. A significant majority, 76.5% of students, expressed the desire to watch the entire film despite initial reservations upon learning that it had a social theme.
2. A notable portion, 70.6% of students, already had awareness about the issue of child trafficking before watching the film.
3. Knowledge about other forms of human trafficking was relatively evenly distributed among students (47.1% to 52.9%). Those who named a different type mostly mentioned women's trafficking, likely influenced by news coverage.
4. The majority, 82.4% of students, had not travelled abroad for at least a month, indicating that their experience with foreign countries is primarily derived from short family trips.
5. A substantial majority, 88.2% of students, had encountered foreigners in their daily lives.
6. A modest percentage, 23.5% of students, had prior exposure to African culture, indicating that the majority had limited knowledge about the continent before the lesson, and the foreigners they had encountered were not from Africa.
7. All students expressed curiosity about the lifestyles in other countries or continents by the end of the lesson.
8. Looking ahead, 58.8% of students contemplated living abroad at some point in the future, while the remaining 41.2% planned to stay in Spain.

This information suggests that these students possess curiosity and interest in the world around them, enjoying travel and interaction with diverse individuals. However, it appears that they may not be fully aware of current events and social challenges.

Moreover, the examination concentrated on gauging students' overall reactions to the activities and their sentiments toward them. To accomplish this, the outcomes, presented as percentages from the Likert scale questions, were illustrated in a bar chart. The 10 questions are featured on the chart, arranged in numerical order from 1 to 10, corresponding to the following inquiries:

1. Did you find the class interesting?
2. Did it provoke in you some reflection on social issues?
3. Did it provoke in you some reflection about your situation?
4. Does it invite you to learn more things about Africa?
5. Did it open your mind about stereotypes?
6. How easy do you think it is to act against human trafficking?
7. Do you consider yourself luckier than other people?
8. Do you think you could do something to prevent human trafficking?
9. Do you see yourself as a future globetrotter instead of staying and living in your own country?
10. To what extent are you affected by some form of injustice? (Moral, social, ecological, etc.)?

The graph below presents the results of the analysis:

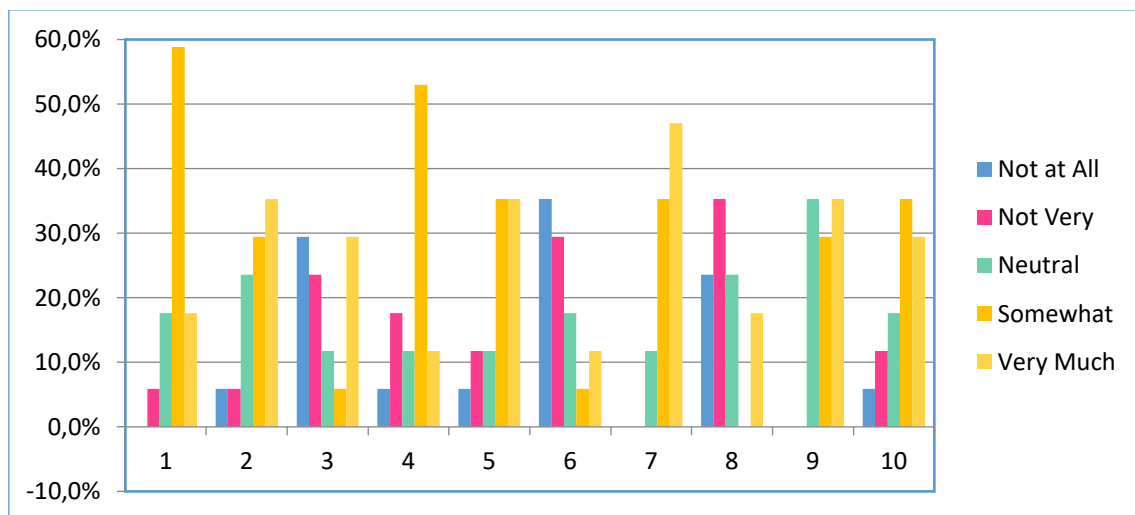


Figure 5. Likert scale questions analysis

In this chart, the following observations are made:

1. 58.8% of students displayed some level of interest in the topic and the proposed activities.
2. 29.4% of students acknowledged that the lesson had prompted them to reflect on social issues to a varying extent, with 5.9% expressing indifference.

3. Reflecting on sensitive issues did not necessarily translate to considering them a part of their reality. 29.4% of students remained indifferent to how the issues described in the lesson impacted or were relatable to their own reality.
4. A majority, 64.7% of students, expressed a desire to continue learning about Africa and its cultures, while 23.5% admitted disinterest in this topic.
5. 70.6% of students learned about or confirmed the existence of stereotypes related to different cultures, countries, ethnic groups, etc. They also acknowledged the importance of dispelling these stereotypes and getting to know each individual on a personal level.
6. Concerningly, 64.7% of students expressed pessimism about the possibility of taking action against human trafficking. This issue could be addressed in future lessons focused on interculturality and Education for Global Citizenship.
7. 82.4% of students considered themselves luckier than other people, a question designed to encourage them to compare their reality to that of Moussa and Amadou, reflecting the experiences of trafficked children.
8. A small percentage, 5.8% of students, felt powerless to fight against these injustices, potentially viewing them as situations that remain distant from their lives.
9. In contrast to a previous question, 64.7% of students expressed eagerness to travel abroad rather than stay in Spain, indicating an evolving perspective throughout the questionnaire. Encouraging students to question themselves appears to be an effective tool for fostering reflection.
10. 64.7% of students declared themselves sensitive towards injustice and empathetic. However, a small number admitted to having no interest at all in this issue.

This information indicates that students valued the activities and the chosen topic. They actively engaged in the entire process, allowing the learning journey to unfold, making it their own, and reflecting on different aspects of the issues discussed.

- Qualitative Evaluation

To qualitatively assess the progress achieved in the four teaching sessions, the writing activities of various groups, along with the responses to the third part of the questionnaire mentioned earlier, were reviewed. The latter aimed to measure students' interest, research skills, creativity, personal development, and social engagement, particularly about the topics discussed during the lesson.

This evaluation segment primarily emphasised the accurate use of written English. Students strategically assigned roles within each group to ensure the active participation of every member

and provide support to those facing challenges in the task. The outcomes were highly satisfactory. Despite the time constraints, the texts, while not overly extensive, were well-structured and grammatically sound, with only minor phrasing and spelling issues. Leveraging their mobile phones and the internet, students researched the provided headlines and sought vocabulary meanings in dictionaries. The collaborative writing activity demonstrated success both in terms of teamwork and individual contributions. Students invested time in researching the topic, drafting responses to key questions (who, what, why, etc.), and evenly distributing group tasks (assignment of writing responsibilities, overseeing text structure, error correction, and final revisions before submitting their work).

- Self-Assessment (SWOT for education analysis)

SWOT analysis (Trujillo, 2010) is an easy-to-use tool and a powerful mechanism for the analysis of reality and decision-making. On the one hand, it takes into account the Strengths and Weaknesses of internal factors, those found inside the school (staff, properties, processes, and products). On the other hand, it analyses the Opportunities and Threats of external factors (demographic, economic, technological, cultural, environmental, sociological, political, and legal). Among all applications of this tool, the ones outstanding for this paper are: the teachers' reflection on their development as professionals and the evaluation of the lesson plan implemented in this study.

Drawing upon the notes in their learning journals and reflecting on the activities implemented, the SWOT analysis table (refer to Table 2) can be completed to ease the analysis of the teacher's work, the effectiveness of the activities, and the integration of interculturality and Education for Sustainable Development and Global Citizenship within the curriculum.

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Energy, enthusiasm, and eagerness to work exhibited by young teachers - Issues that can be addressed comprehensively - A participatory process - An innovative proposal adaptable to the future of education - Experiences from organisations to draw upon - Opportunity to assess changes - Potential to instigate tangible changes in the daily management of the centre - Development of communicative competence in English as a Second Language (ESL) with a focus on Education for Global Citizenship 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Time limits the development of this study - Young teachers' lack of experience - Absence of teachers' assistants trained in the subject (big groups of students) - Lack of motivation and teacher training in these subjects - Lack of time during school hours - Complexity of educational reality - Process contingent on teachers particularly interested in these subjects - Lack of communication between centres that could develop similar projects - Lesson intended to encompass a lot of knowledge at once

Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Including Education for Global Citizenship in the curriculum has already been proposed- Increasing talk about interculturality and the importance of knowing how to be part of a global society- Possible support of this project by other organizations or groups- Young people considering professional or educational stays abroad	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Society does not give importance to Education for Global Citizenship within the educational system (lack of support)- It implies policy changes- It may lead to the imposition by the central administration (difficult acceptance)- It can end up becoming an empty element of the curriculum

Table 2. SWOT analysis

Following the SWOT analysis, certain conclusions regarding professional development have emerged. To advance in research, success strategies and indicators must be investigated and applied to enhance my teaching practice, accentuate the positive aspects of this proposal, and mitigate the negative ones. Undoubtedly, delving into this exceptional resource requires time and dedication from all involved.

8. Conclusions

Blending conceptual knowledge with practical experience renders teaching a complex activity, requiring many years to master adequately. The overarching goal of Education for Sustainable Development and Global Citizenship is to transform society—its mentality, attitudes, laws, traditions, and behaviour—into a mature entity that transcends unjust or inhumane positions, recognizing every person as deserving of rights, respect, and dignity. Cinema, in contemporary society, wields substantial cultural, artistic, and human influence. Films serve as a medium through which the values and countervalues of the world are expressed. Moreover, cinema creates environments conducive to coexistence, fostering attitudes of dialogue, negotiation, compromise, and commitment. Social problems portrayed on screen and resolved in unique ways often become life lessons, prompting reflection, critical analysis, and even shifts in attitudes.

All learning, including general culture, is perceived as structured around meaningful coherence and rationality. It constitutes a systematic knowledge framework that enriches understanding, cultivates critical thinking, improves human behaviour, and fuels the desire for continuous learning.

This survey aims to analyse the feasibility of promoting Education for Global Citizenship through cooperative activities in English as a Foreign Language (EFL). Additionally, it investigates whether

the use of Intercultural Cinema as the primary tool ensures effective engagement with the aforementioned issues.

Regarding the second objective, initial resistance to a lesson involving social content was observed, but this resistance diminished as students acquired more information on the subject. Increased knowledge correlated with an enhanced willingness to learn. The selection of the film "Diamantes Negros" (2013) as the main resource for this lesson appears to have made a significant difference, particularly in terms of motivating and encouraging students to exert effort. Attention to students' interests and motivations in material and activity creation is also noteworthy.

Several areas have been identified for further research. This investigation could expand to encompass a broader range of intercultural films addressing diverse topics, and the lesson plans designed for their implementation could be tested on a larger student population for more conclusive results. Moreover, the proposal could be adapted to different levels, languages, and areas of the curriculum, such as teaching values in physical education classes.

The theoretical concepts presented in this work—interculturalism, Education for Sustainable Development and Global Citizenship, cooperative learning, and learning through films—have traditionally been studied independently. By combining and integrating these elements in this proposal, we aim to present a holistic approach to education that provides comprehensive training for the citizens of the future.

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