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DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.5617/adno.6144>

Understanding the Psychological Reading Process: Preparing Pre-service ESL Teachers to Become Reading Teachers

Abstract

This article addresses the metacognitive skills of pre-service ESL teachers in terms of their future role as reading teachers for intermediate and advanced pupils. Reading is a basic skill in all subjects in the Norwegian National Curriculum and involves engaging in texts, understanding, applying and reflecting on what is read – activities requiring higher level thinking. My research questions are: 1) How can “narrative transportation theory” (Gerrig, 1993) help pre-service ESL teachers understand the psychological reading process? and 2) How can insight into this theory motivate them to become better reading teachers, able to facilitate deep learning through literature? I use Julie Bertagna’s science fiction trilogy (Exodus 2002; Zenith 2007; Aurora 2011) to illustrate how narrative transportation works, highlighting the literary qualities that trigger pleasurable reading through immersion into the storyworld. This choice is based on Sections 1.5 and 2.5.3 in the new “Overarching section – values and principles for mandatory education” (2017) of the national curriculum, which instructs schools to teach pupils about their responsibility in contributing to an ecologically sustainable world order. The trilogy thematizes climate change and can affect behavior and attitudes toward this issue positively; it activates a wide spectrum of emotions, facilitating persuasion. Teachers must, however, remember that reading for pleasure is not enough; they must use metacognitive reading strategies in their teaching of literature to ensure deep learning and reach curricular goals.

Keywords: teenage literature, narrative transportation theory, metacognition, metacognitive reading strategies, Julie Bertagna’s Exodus Trilogy, ecological sustainability, ESL, teaching reading

Å forstå psykologiske leseprosesser: Lærerstudenten som leselærer i engelskfaget

Sammendrag

Denne artikkelen handler om lærerstudenters metakognitive ferdigheter i sammenheng med leseundervisningen i engelskfaget. Lesing er en av de grunnleggende ferdighetene i alle fag i Kunnskapsløftet. Dette innebærer å være engasjert i, forstå, bruke og reflektere over det som leses, samt bruk av lesestrategier – dette krever metakognitiv tenkning. Forskningsspørsmålene er: 1) Hvordan kan “narrativ transport-teori” (Gerrig, 1993) hjelpe lærerstudenter i engelskfaget til å forstå den psykologiske leseprosessen? og 2) Hvordan kan kunnskap om denne teorien motivere dem til å utvikle seg som lærere i lesing, med evnen til å fostre dybdelæring gjennom litteratur? Jeg bruker Julie Bertagnas ungdomstrilogi i sjangeren science-fiction (Exodus 2002; Zenith 2007; Aurora 2011), for å illustrere hvordan narrativ transport fungerer, og belyser litterære kvaliteter som setter det i gang. Valget baseres hovedsakelig på Overordnet del av læreplanen (2017) som omtaler “Respekt for naturen og miljøbevissthet” (1.5) og “Bærekraftig utvikling” (2.5.3), der skolen får i oppdrag å lære elever om ansvaret de har for å skape en økologisk bærekraftig utvikling. Trilogien tematiserer klimaendringer og kan påvirke leserens atferd og holdninger. Fortellingen kan igangsette mange følelser, som igjen kan forsterke eller endre leserens overbevisning. Men lærere må huske at lesing som underholdning ikke er nok; de må ta i bruk metakognitive lesestrategier i sin undervisning for å sikre dybdelæring og oppnå læreplanmålene.

Nøkkelord: ungdomslitteratur, narrativ transport-teori, metakognisjon, metakognitive lesestrategier, Julie Bertagnas Exodus Trilogy, bærekraftig utvikling, engelsk som annet språk, leseundervisning

Introduction

In the *Framework for Basic Skills* (Norway, 2013b), the Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training establishes reading, writing, speaking, numeracy and digital skills as basic skills to be integrated throughout the school curriculum in all subjects. Here I discuss the implications this has for the instruction of pre-service ESL (English as a Second Language) teachers, focusing on the basic skill of reading. Both pre-service ESL teachers and their educators need to see themselves not only as language teachers, but also as *reading* teachers.

The *Framework* explains the basic skill of reading as follows:

Reading means to create meaning from text in the widest sense. Reading gives insight into other people's experience, opinion[s] and knowledge, independent of time and place. The reading of texts on screen and paper is a prerequisite for lifelong learning and for active participation in civic life.

To read involves engaging in texts, comprehending, applying what is read and reflecting on this. In the context of this basic Framework, texts include everything that can be read in different media, including illustrations, graphs, symbols or other modes of expression. Knowledge about what characterizes different types of texts and their function is an important part of reading as a basic skill. (Norway, 2013b, p. 8)

Engagement, comprehension, application and reflection require readers to go beyond the basic decoding stage; this means that they must be able to think critically about their own understanding and are aware of their own cognitive experience. This ties in with the focus on deep learning and metacognition emphasized in the newest Norwegian strategy document on education, *Fremtidens skole – Fornyelse av fag og kompetanse* [The school of the future – Renewal of subjects and competence] (Norway, 2015), developed by the Ludvigsen Committee, which states: “That pupils are able to reflect over the purpose of what they are learning, what they have learned, and how they learn is called metacognition” (Norway, 2015, p. 10, my trans.). This is higher order thinking, which involves active awareness and control of the cognitive processes engaged in learning (Flavel, 1985). Furthermore, “Being able to use different strategies for planning, carrying out and evaluating one's own learning and work processes are a part of this” (Norway, 2015, p. 10, my trans.). Metacognitive strategies refer to the methods used to help pupils understand the way they learn: to help them “think about their thinking”. Here I am particularly interested in the potential of literary texts in the ESL classroom in relation to metacognition, reading strategies and literary didactics in teacher training.

Recent studies in Scandinavia (Wicklund, Larsen & Vikbrant, 2016; Skaar, Elvebakk & Nilssen, 2016) have examined Nordic teacher trainees' relationships to reading literature in their native languages, problematizing the students' competence in literature and the challenges that teacher education is facing. These researchers have analyzed first-year students' “reading histories”, where they report their reading habits from childhood to the present day. Wicklund et al. (2016, pp. 119–120) saw clear indications that students specializing in grades 1-7 are less active as readers of literature than those specializing in grades 5-10. Both student groups are generally quite positive towards reading, and many read for pleasure and relaxation. However, they have little experience with more advanced literature or with a more reflective approach to literature.

Similarly, Skaar et al. (2016), cite newer research revealing that many teacher trainees read very little, and a significant number do not read at all (e.g. Brink, 2009). They warn that teacher education colleges cannot assume that students are already readers, or that they will be able to develop into good readers on their own. Skaar et al. also found that there was a dichotomy between

students' expressed liking for literary texts and their actual reading of such texts – reading is clearly not prioritized in these students' lives, and it seems less likely than before that they will be able to draw on their own personal interests in reading to motivate pupils when they become teachers. These results are alarming, as we know that the engagement of teachers is absolutely necessary in motivating pupils to explore literature (De Naeghel et al., 2014). Teachers function as reading models for their pupils. If reading is a problem in their native language, this is likely to impact on their engagement in reading English literature as well. These empirical studies suggest that teacher trainees need to think about and monitor their own behavior as readers. Considering their own history as readers and raising their awareness of their role as reading teachers and models for their future pupils can facilitate metacognition and deep learning in both students and pupils.

The findings in these studies are in line with reports from many of my pre-service ESL students about their own reading habits and relation to reading literature during the past ten years. Many of them have protested that stopping the flow of reading to question, comment or write notes on a story interferes with the joy of reading. The English Subject Curriculum does point out that “[l]iterary texts in the English language can provide reading pleasure for an entire life”, but goes on to add “and a deeper understanding of others and ourselves” (Norway, 2013a, p. 1). The second part of this postulate requires metacognition and the use of metacognitive strategies. Reading for pleasure is not enough if pupils (and students) are to experience deep learning.

Reading literary texts in ESL classes is an integral part of the curriculum and has proven useful in many areas of language learning. Pupils are exposed to new grammatical features (Prowse, 2003, p. 40) as well as cultural aspects of the language (Lazar, 2012, p. 16). ESL students work with a selection of adult literature aimed at increasing their own competence in English, alongside selections of literature for children and young adults, which prepare them for their work in the classroom. The present English Subject Curriculum does not prescribe set texts or methodology. In terms of reading, pupils need to read large amounts of text – so called extensive reading – for language acquisition and in order to become fluent and confident readers (Krashen, 1981, 2004; Waring, 2009), so teachers need to choose and work with longer literary texts in their classrooms.

Here I want to introduce a theoretical framework which may help pre-service ESL teachers to reflect on what happens when a reader is immersed in a storyworld. *Narrative transportation theory* was developed by psychologists interested in the reading process, beginning with Gerrig (1993), who introduced the term “transportation” and the seminal analysis of the mechanism in his book *Experiencing Narrative Worlds*. I argue that learning about this theory can help students understand why reading for pleasure is not enough and that this can

motivate them to work with metacognitive reading strategies when teaching literary texts.

Research Questions

I address the following research questions:

- 1) How can narrative transportation theory help pre-service ESL teachers understand the psychological reading process?
- 2) How can insight into this theory motivate them to become better reading teachers, able to facilitate deep learning through literature?

I begin with an overview of narrative transportation theory. To exemplify its mechanisms, I have chosen Scottish author Julie Bertagna's award-winning science-fiction trilogy for young adults *Exodus* (2002), *Zenith* (2003) and *Aurora* (2011). The trilogy is thematically relevant for a number of the overarching goals of the *Knowledge Promotion*, (Norway, 2017) notably sections 1.5 (Respect for nature and environmental awareness, p. 167, my trans.) and 2.5.3 (Sustainable development, p. 171, my trans.). Here, all subject teachers are set the task of teaching pupils about "problems related to the environment and climate, poverty and the distribution of resources, conflicts, health, equality, demography and education" (p. 171, my trans.).

The trilogy is suitable for intermediate and advanced ESL pupils. It envisions a dystopian future world where the polar ice caps have melted, leaving people clinging on to a primitive life on small, isolated islands, living in fleets of interconnected boats and in "sky cities", which resemble over-dimensional oil platforms. According to the tenets of narrative transportation theory, the trilogy can potentially affect behavior and attitudes through its thematization of climate change because it activates a wide spectrum of emotions that can facilitate persuasion at the same time as it is an enjoyable read for young people. In my discussion of the novels I also include a number of the semi-standardized issues and traits of young adult literature (McCallum, 2006), that help to increase their engagement potential.

Narrative Transportation Theory

Narrative transportation theory has been used in psychological and sociological research, where the underlying processes that allow stories to affect individuals' real-world thoughts and actions and their engagement in narratives have been investigated. Gerrig carried out the seminal work, introducing two metaphors to characterize the experience of narrative worlds: being transported into a narrative world and performing that narrative (1993, pp. 2–3). These metaphors were based on an analogy between narrative experience and the literal experience of travelling. Although Gerrig turned to literature to illustrate his

ideas, he refocused attention from narratives themselves to how we as readers or viewers experience narrative worlds, emphasizing the persuasive power of narratives (1993). Stories can transport us into alternative worlds while conveying more or less implicit ideological messages. Teachers must be able to extract and evaluate these messages in order to make informed curricular choices.

Close contact with the narrative world affects the reader/viewer more or less automatically according to Gerrig, and all narratives share a common core of processes that implement this transportation; readers who are “lost in a book” tend to feel empathy for and identify with characters, for example (1993, p. 7). Gerrig and his colleagues have carried out empirical research to test his ideas. Several of his studies demonstrate how stories can change people’s beliefs or attitudes. In one study, his research team constructed a narrative that suggested that mental illness can be contagious. Those who read the story were more likely afterwards to believe that this was the case than members of a control group who had read an unrelated story (Prentice & Gerrig, 1999). Understanding how stories can manipulate readers emotionally highlights the need for metacognitive reading strategies in the classroom.

A number of Gerrig’s associates, notably Green and Brock (1998; 2000; 2002) developed Gerrig’s ideas on the persuasiveness of narrative in partly new directions, relating them to levels of transportability and media enjoyment. They found that readers vary in the extent to which they are “transportable”. Some slip into narrative worlds with little or no resistance, whereas others are not as easily “hooked”. Green and Brock were interested in measuring levels of narrative transportation and developed a 15-item self-report transportation scale (2000, p. 704). Using likert scales ranging from 1 (not at all) to 7 (very much), they asked participants to rank statements such as “I was emotionally involved in the narrative while reading it” and “I could picture myself in the scene of the events described in the narrative”. The scale showed good internal consistency and correlated with measures of identification with characters and absorption in the story.

Green and Fitzgerald point out other factors that influence transportability: the quality of the story itself plays a role, as do similarities between the reader’s life and the life and characters portrayed in the narrative world (2016, pp. 1–5). In relation to young readers, this also supports Rönqvist and Sell’s (1994, p. 125) argument that language teachers should choose teenage books for teenagers rather than simplified classics: “Teenage pupils like and want to understand these works because they provide access to the colloquial language used by native-speaking teenagers and because they have themes and plots of interest to teenagers”. This was also an important factor determining my choice of literary example here. Like Gerrig, Green and Fitzgerald observed that when individuals are transported into a narrative world, they often lose track of the surrounding

environment and of time. Readers can also experience powerful emotions as a result of their immersion in the story (2016, p. 1).

The theory and some of the empirical studies carried out to test it also help us appreciate how other types of narrative affect us, whether they are factual, fictional or consumer-directed. Brechman and Purvis (2015) carried out empirical studies in the context of business, and found that for some people, advertisements formed as narratives can be more persuasive than argument-based messages, depending on their levels of transportability. Similarly, Kim, Lloyd and Cervellon (2015) studied how narrative-transportation storylines engage and involve consumers through luxury brand advertising in different cultural contexts.

Green and Fitzgerald (2016) were also interested in applying transportation theory to narratives used to communicate about health issues and health risks. They created narratives modeling healthy lifestyles and appropriate communication with health workers, testing them on patients, and discovered that as a rule, preaching about the right thing to do in order to influence lifestyle choices is not as effective as narratives portraying characters that readers can identify with and circumstances which resemble their own (2016).

Furthermore, Green, Brock and Kaufman (2004, p. 311) argue that transportation theory “provides a lens for understanding the concept of media enjoyment” and “suggests that enjoyment can benefit from the experience of being immersed in a narrative world, as well as from the consequences of that immersion”. Readers may experience connections with characters and self-transformations. They maintain however, that there are a number of differences between transportation and enjoyment:

For example, transportation is thought to leave the experiencer’s beliefs and perceptions changed in some measurable way, whereas enjoyment does not imply measurable change. The reader will see that enjoyment is invariably positive but that transportation, traveling via fiction to some unfamiliar bornes, can sometimes be downright scary. (2004, p. 313)

The valence of emotions in a narrative does not necessarily determine whether we enjoy a story. We often enjoy “traveling to the dark side” and are entertained by stories where characters suffer or are in deep peril (p. 315). Enjoyment of a transportation experience is a consequence of the process of “temporarily leaving one’s reality behind and emerging from the experience somehow different from the person one was before entering the milieu of the narrative” (p. 315). Long-lasting change, however, requires reflection on what one has read and critical thinking.

Green, Brock and Kaufman (2004, p. 320) sum up the relationship between narrative transportation and media enjoyment as follows:

Transportation theory suggests that some aspects of enjoyment are comprised of fundamental processes relating to the self. In some cases, enjoyment may simply be the reduction of a negative state of self-focus. From a more positive perspective, enjoyment also may involve positive affect from expanding the self and gaining new knowledge about the self or the world. Enjoyment also arises from satisfaction of a basic need for connections between self and other.

When selecting enjoyable literature for ESL classrooms, it is important to remember:

Not all narratives or all reading situations create a powerful sense of transportation. Rather, aspects of the individual, the narrative, and the situation can all influence the extent of immersion into a story. Primary influences on transportation include story quality, individual differences in ‘transportability’, the match between reader knowledge and story content, and reader goals. (Green & Donahue, 2009, p. 245)

Teachers obviously cannot influence the basic transportability of individual pupils, but they can pay attention to the quality of the narrative, the language level and the reading situation. Green and Fitzgerald (2016, p. 1) list five basic mechanisms that can explain what happens when a reader is transported into a narrative and falls out of touch with the real world: “reduced counterarguing, connections with characters, heightened perceptions of realism, the formation of vivid mental imagery, and emotional engagement”. These mechanisms may help pre-service teachers to find narratives that are likely to appeal to young readers, giving them an enjoyable reading experience, but teachers should not overlook the additional potential for developing their pupils’ metacognitive skills in relation to reading and meeting the goals of the core curriculum. In the following sections the five mechanisms of narrative transportation structure my discussion of Bertagna’s *Exodus* Trilogy.

Materials: The Exodus Trilogy

Critics (Ames, 2013; Curtis, 2014; Hammer, 2010; Harrison, 2012; McCulloch, 2007; Ostry, 2014) and reviewers (Hoffman, 2007) have written enthusiastically about Bertagna’s trilogy and its thematization of climate change, and it has won a number of awards. The first volume of the trilogy opens on New Year’s Eve, in the year 2099. The meltdown of the polar icecaps has devastated the earth. The oceans continue rising and the teenage protagonist Mara Bell, her family, and the other villagers are forced to flee their homes on the island of Wing in rickety boats, looking for refuge elsewhere. And like today’s climate and war refugees, they find no safe harbor, but are blocked out, corralled and attacked, leaving many of them dead, and the survivors in desperate conditions. This dystopian vision of the future resonates with present-day climate predictions and

actual events, creating unease, but the fantasy format of the trilogy gives readers a chance to face this possible scenario from the safe distance of defamiliarization; they are allowed to see some aspects of the human experience with fresh eyes.

Bertagna's tale of the end of the world has the potential to function as a wake-up call for both future generations and our own in terms of ecological and humanitarian activism. The post-apocalyptic mood of the story is ironically balanced by bursts of youthful optimism and hope. The ideological aim of this fluctuation from doomsday to a new dawn is to persuade readers that we must act now to save the *real* world from the impact of climate change. The balance between optimism and a dystopian worldview is absolutely necessary; an exclusively bleak vision of the future can cause readers to reject the message outright (Fransen et al., 2015).

Narrative Transportation Mechanisms in the Trilogy

Reduced Counter-arguing

Readers who are highly transportable lose contact with the outside world; they willingly suspend their disbelief. According to Dal Cin et al. (2004, p. 178), this means that persuasive messages are conveyed to the reader "under the radar". When transported, readers may not even be aware that a narrative is persuasive or they do not expect to be influenced. They let down their defenses and fail to scrutinize the embedded messages as thoroughly as they would in a straight-forward advocacy attempt. Thus: "narrative persuasion functions, at least in part, by obscuring the persuasive intent of the communicator" (Dal Cin et al., 2004, p. 182). Here the teacher can bring in metacognitive reading strategies, asking readers how the story affects their emotions, how they connect it to their own lives, and what they already know about climate change.

A major attitude-changing characteristic of narratives is their tendency to reduce counter-arguing. Research on transportation theory has shown that narratives work better than other advocacy messages when it comes to influencing behavior related for example to health risks (Dal Cin et al., 2004; Houston et al., 2011). This is because narratives involve readers emotionally in the events described since they often identify with one or more of the characters in the story. When absorbed in a narrative, readers are left with little motivation or even ability to produce counterarguments to the persuasive messages in a text because all of their mental faculties are engaged in the narrative experience itself. Many readers are not willing to interrupt their enjoyment to argue with the events, claims or overall message.

An important factor that reduces counter-arguments in teens reading Bertagna's trilogy is the genre of the work itself. Young people today are fond of the fantasy and science fiction genres, having grown up with J. K. Rowling's

Harry Potter series, Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* and similar works. Witches, wizards, and teenagers with extraordinary powers are part of their everyday popular culture. The people living in the different communities that the teenage protagonist Mara encounters on her journeys in Bertagna's trilogy, whether they live in nests in trees (the Treenesters), wear skates to zip around in a sky city, or have gills and webbed feet and hands (the "ratbashers"), fit easily into the thinking patterns of fantasy-sensitized teens. The teacher can help pupils think through the genre of the story and compare it with other stories they have read.

Fantasy and science-fiction stories are always rooted in reality in some way; many of them tend to deal with the anxiety and feelings of upheaval that are so common to the adolescent experience. But they allow readers to work through real-world problems from a one-step remove. This defamiliarization offers safety; the events are not real and readers can therefore allow themselves to relax and be entertained, blocking out the real world. This also makes them more susceptible to the implicit messages in the narrative. Despite its fantasy format, Bertagna's *Exodus* trilogy is also cannily realistic because it plays on the news stories teens have heard since childhood about the melting polar icecaps, increasingly violent and destructive storms all over the world, and desperate migrants seeking refuge in hostile harbors. The successive dystopian settings and eco-systems in the trilogy thus seem to be plausible extrapolations on this development, a hundred years in the future, and this, too, inhibits counter-arguments. For this reason, teachers should facilitate discussions that help pupils connect their knowledge of these phenomena to the story and their own experiences.

Connecting with Characters

Being able to connect with the characters in a narrative also facilitates transportation and reduces counter-arguing. Mara, the central protagonist of the trilogy, is introduced to us as a feisty character, unwilling to accept the nonchalance of her fellow islanders about the rising sea. When Taine – the oldest member of the village – tries to rally the villagers on New Year's Eve to plan for the coming apocalypse, Mara is the only one who listens: "But a girl, cheeks blazing, dark eyes flashing, her long hair glistening like a midnight ocean, jumps up on to the toppled stone to stand beside the old man and pleads with the crowd to stay and listen to him" (Bertagna, 2002, p. 3).

Mara is fifteen, about the same age as potential trilogy readers, and according to narrative transportation theory it is thus easier for them to identify with her. She is presented as dynamic: blazing, flashing, glistening and jumping. Although identification and transportation are not synonymous, putting oneself in the character's place and adopting his or her goals can facilitate attitude change in the experiencer. Bertagna also includes a second protagonist, David

Stone, aka “Fox”, who is Mara’s first lover, another rebellious character, with a mane of fox-colored hair. Providing both a female and a male protagonist opens the narrative world for both female and male readers. This is especially important for boys who read the trilogy, as they often prefer male protagonists, whereas girls read more prolifically and identify more easily with characters of both genders (Jacobs, 2004).

To ease connection with the characters and prompt attitude and behavioral change, the narrative also reminds readers of the experiences in their own lives that can be related to what happens in the story. They should be encouraged to reflect on and find those connections. Adolescents share a number of commonalities that have become “standardized” issues of modern young adult literature (YAL):

- personal issues (the body, appearance, sexuality, romance, pregnancy, drug abuse, suicide, maintaining private space, etc.);
- intrafamily issues (intergenerational and/or sibling conflict, family breakup, etc.);
- interpersonal issues (peer group interactions and conflicts, gendering, conflict with authority, disharmony between personal situation and contemporary culture or sociality, and alienation, etc.). (McCallum, 2006)

As McCallum (2006) explains, YAL also tends to be characterized by common thematic or ideological concerns, such as the formation of an adult identity, solidarity with a group’s ideals and the experience of sexual maturity. The *Exodus Trilogy* focuses on many of these personal, intrafamily and interpersonal issues, making the characters seem realistic in spite of the futuristic setting. Mara fights with her mother and father, is irritated by her little brother and bored by the restrictions in her everyday life; she is a typical teenager. During the course of the trilogy she loses her family and must suddenly become an independent adult. She meets Fox, and has her first romantic involvement and sexual relationship, which results in pregnancy. In terms of interpersonal issues, she is in conflict with the villagers, who blame her for persuading them to leave their island home, only to end up as boat refugees starving outside the walls of the sky city New Mungo. This pattern is repeated when she takes on adult responsibilities as the leader of different groups of people, who are not always satisfied with her decisions.

Furthermore, Mara has a “cyberwizz” – an antiquated, sun-powered device – which connects her to what is left of the Internet or “Weave”:

Restlessly, she toys with the apple-sized globe that lies on her windowsill alongside its tiny wand and crescent-shaped halo. The globe, wand and halo – her cyberwizz – is

the only thing that stops her dying of boredom, she's quite sure. The cyberwizz is freedom, escape, release. (Bertagna, 2002, p. 25)

This electronic device gives her information about the sky cities and connects her to Fox. Pupils should be able to reflect on how their lives would change without the Internet, cell phones and computers, for better and for worse.

Teenagers may also connect with the imaginary situation of these protagonists. As Basu, Broad and Hintz (2013) point out in their discussion of dystopian fiction for young adults, these books have a complicated allure. They combine didacticism and escape:

The YA dystopia presumes that adolescents should be idealists, offering a gratifying view of adolescent readers as budding political activists – a portrayal that flatters adolescents and reassures adults that they are more than apathetic youth. However, the easily digestible prescription suggested by many of these novels may allow young readers to avoid probing the nuances, ambiguities, and complexities of social ills and concerns too deeply. (2013, p. 5)

Although it may be true that the entertainment value of these books discourages counter-arguing or deeper reflection, allowing implicit messages to slip under the radar, they have the potential to catalyze reflection and critical thinking as well. Environmental issues are addressed and teenagers are shown that they can have an active political role in shaping their future and that of the planet. Teachers can encourage readers to find out about the goals and work of environmental groups both nationally and internationally and relate this to their reading.

Another factor that helps transport readers is escapism. Basu, Broad and Hintz see young adult dystopias and postapocalyptic fiction “as a release from the overscheduled pressures of contemporary adolescent lives” (2013, p. 6). They quote science fiction writer Scott Westerfield:

The other side of the boom in dystopian teen novels is a boom in post-apocalyptic tales. The system is asking a lot from teenagers and not giving them much respect in return, so it's no wonder that stories about that system exploding, breaking down under its own contradictions, or simply being overrun by zombies are also beloved of teenagers.

What is the apocalypse but an everlasting snow day? An excuse to tear up all those college applications, which suddenly aren't going to determine the rest of your life? (2013, p. 6)

The dystopian “snow day” where daily routines and expectations no longer apply opens a new room in the teen imagination. Their real life experience of such a day or perhaps a longer period of disruption is a micro-version of the

post-apocalyptic experience. What will the protagonists do with their new-found freedom? The entertainment value of escapism transports readers into the narrative. The teacher should seize the opportunity to go beyond reading for pleasure by scaffolding activities and discussions that help teens consider the implicit didactic messages embedded in such exciting stories.

A Heightened Perception of Realism and the Formation of Vivid Mental Images

The third and fourth mechanisms that Green and Fitzgerald believe help transport readers into a narrative are closely related. I will therefore discuss experiencing a heightened perception of realism and forming vivid mental images in tandem in this section. Both concern stylistic devices, important to the quality of the narrative. Bertagna uses clear, striking images, which are especially effective in the descriptions of the different eco-systems that Mara's journeys take her to. Although the story takes place a hundred years in the future, the settings seem highly realistic. In spite of the rising seas, we are still on earth and recognize natural phenomena. We start out on a small, drowning island in the Atlantic:

The people of Wing are gathering in what's left of their village. Downhill, the salty, sea-lashed streets run straight into churning, cold-boiled ocean. The oldest islanders can remember a time when Wing's folding hills sheered away to sandstone cliffs that plunged on to a wide and rocky shore. The clifftops were still visible at ebb tide last summer, haunting the waves with their dark shadows.

Now it's all ocean. (Bertagna, 2002, p. 1)

From Wing the characters flee to the high-tech "sky city" of New Mungo, built on top of the submerged city of Glasgow. This is one of a string of sky cities spread across the globe. Mara has found information about sky cities through the "Weave", the deteriorated remnants of the Internet; it is a dysfunctional, potentially dangerous illusion. Mara enters the virtual reality of the weave like a game player, exploring a landscape of ruined buildings, decaying bridges and nefarious clubs. She catches a glimpse of a fox slinking around in the ruins. This animal turns out to be David Stone's avatar in the weave, and she soon recognizes him in New Mungo as a fellow gamer. The game-players among the pupils can identify with the characters here. A wider discussion on the Internet could be brought up here. Are our electronic devices stealing our attention away from the real world, preventing us from taking action, or can we find the answers to future challenges here? Mara and Fox use the cyberwizz for escape and entertainment, but they also use it to connect with each other and find information, no matter how obsolete, that might help them understand and improve their predicament.

Having lost her family during the voyage, Mara desperately attacks the wall surrounding New Mungo, built to keep the refugees out. This too, will seem familiar to today's teens who have seen reports about how thousands of refugees from Africa and the Middle East have been kept out of Europe, or heard about President Trump's planned wall between the U.S. and Mexico. The fear of migrant peoples who "threaten" our own welfare and demand to share *our* resources makes us ironically similar to the leaders of New Mungo. They decide who is allowed in and who must be kept out. Mara manages to get inside with the help of a small child, or "sea urchin" when a gate in the wall is opened for a supply boat.

Inside she finds a second eco-system, the "Netherworld", inhabited by swimming children with webbed feet and gills and "Treenesters" who live in trees amongst the sunken towers of Glasgow University and the highest points of the former town topography. They survive by harvesting the eggs of seabirds, eating plants and sea-creatures and dressing in plastic remnants they dredge from the rancid water. Like the inhabitants of Wing, they are a community plummeted back into subsistence living in a pre-industrial society.

In this connection, McCulloch relates the trilogy to the nation of Scotland itself (2007). The narrative world is rooted in Scotland, through the place names adopted by the Treenesters to commemorate their sunken cityscape (Broomielaw, Candleriggs, etc.); the ruthless founding father of the sky city "Caledon" (Caledonia is the feminized form, synonymous with Scotland); Mara's resemblance to Thena, mother of St. Mungo, the original founder of Glasgow; and the symbolic use of the tree, the ring, the fish, the bell and the bird from Glasgow's city emblem. These factors could make Glaswegian or Scottish teenagers feel "at home" in the narrative world and reduce counter-arguing. Norwegian pupils would need to do some research to understand these symbols and allusions. Much of the descriptive imagery, however, appeals to all of our senses, allowing us to be transported into this sweltering future world:

As the heat grows, the Treenesters untie much of their plastic clothing. There is no breath of wind and the great wall seems to act like a pressure pot with the metallic network of the sky city a huge grill, cooking the netherworld under slabs of midday heat. (Bertagna, 2002, p. 113)

The Treenesters, cast out of New Mungo, call the swimming children in the Netherworld (the result of a failed genetic experiment in New Mungo aiming to create humans who can survive in water) "Ratbashers" since they catch and eat rats to survive, and are considered to be less than human. Even in the underbelly of the prosperous sky city there are class divisions, warfare and hate; the Treenesters, boat refugees and Ratbashers are subjected to police raids, rounded up and enslaved to build roads and bridges in the city above the Netherworld. Critical thinking and discussion can lead pupils to make connections to and

reflect on present day conflicts caused by climate change and war in their own world.

Bertagna's descriptions of the different settings allow readers to create vivid mental imagery. The Netherworld under New Mungo is rife with decadent images of decay and degeneration, mixing what once existed with post-apocalyptic details. Mara gradually discovers and explores Glasgow Cathedral, along with Glasgow University museums and libraries still partly above water. She approaches these buildings on a raft floating in polluted water:

Beneath the silver darting things are all sorts of ghostly shapes and lines of luminescence that glow eerily beneath the waves. Something shifts in Mara's perception and all of a sudden she knows what she is seeing – rooftops and towers and crumbling walls. Right below her is an old, drowned city. It glimmers like a ghostly presence in the sea. (Bertagna, 2002, pp. 97–98)

These images of a dead world in stagnant waters are strong. The fact that the Treenesters and sea urchins manage to stay alive gives the story a Robinson Crusoe atmosphere, and Mara's exploration of the museums and libraries reminds one of H. G. Wells' Timetraveller in *The Time Machine* (1895) who also searched for tools of survival in the rotting remains of a museum in the distant future. Mara and the Treenester Gorbals find a book about Greenland:

'Greenland is a vast, empty land of mountains locked in ice,' reads Gorbals. 'The interior has been sunk beneath the weight of colossal ice sheets. If ever that weight of ice was to melt it would engulf and drown the lands of the Earth with a billion litres of water for each person on the planet. Yet once freed from her immense burden of ice, Greenland would bob up like a cork, her highlands revealed for the first time since they were locked in the deep freeze of the Ice Age.' (Bertagna, 2002, p. 178)

This information sparks new hope; there may still be land where humans can survive.

Mara finally manages to sneak into New Mungo, a world that is totally artificial, with little contact with the outside world. The average city inhabitant has no idea of the "vile, rotting stench of an open drain" and the "heaving mass of humanity" lying below and outside the walls surrounding the sky city (Bertagna, 2002, p. 66). "A chaos of refugee boats crams the sea around the city and clings like a fungus to the huge wall that seems to bar all entry to refugees" (2002, p. 66). Today's teenagers have no doubt seen reports from refugee camps and pictures of migrants lying drowned on the shores of Europe. Like the characters in many other dystopian narratives, the inhabitants of New Mungo are uninformed about the world outside their artificial bubble; all information is controlled, ostensibly for the common good. Teachers could use this scenario to start discussions on how refugees and migrants are perceived in Norway and Europe today, tying the narrative to core curricular goals.

Mara escapes onboard a supply ship, taking some Treenesters and boat refugees with her. She plans to sail to Greenland. On their way, they crash through the floating boat city of Pomperoy. On Greenland, they are attacked and enslaved by the inhabitants of Ilira. “Gypseas” from Pomperoy have pursued the ship that destroyed their boat city and attack Ilira, giving Mara and her followers the chance to escape. They make their way through mountain caves to the interior of Greenland and establish a new forest village – Candlewood. Each of the settings is vividly described, and they are successively contrasted and compared. Wherever Mara and Fox go they try to create democratic, inclusive communities, in contrast to the dictatorships of New Mungo and Ilira. These attempts, and the comparative success of Candlewood as a community, give classes the opportunity to reflect on democracy and the distribution of wealth in relation to climate change, in line with core curricular goals.

Emotional engagement

A final factor that implements narrative transportation is emotional engagement. Reyna and Rivers (2008, pp. 6–7) believe that all of our attitudes and decisions are influenced by emotions; different stimuli have different “valences” – either positive or negative – that impinge on the decision-making process. They use the example of how advertisements for cigarettes traditionally were associated with fun and social acceptance, creating a positive valence. This tended to outweigh detailed information about the health risks of smoking and has been partly remedied today through the addition of health warnings on cigarette packages. If behavior is to be changed, we have to change the valence of a stimulus, giving negative associations. In the case of climate change, however, the scientific facts generally create a negative valence, causing readers to block out the information. Mixing the information with the pleasures of narrative can change that valence, allowing the important information to slip under the radar of the readers’ awareness, thereby reducing counter-arguing.

Readers who are highly transportable tend to identify with the protagonist in a story. The two protagonists Mara and Fox make it easier for both female and male readers to see similarities between themselves and the characters. Both are still teenagers who have only taken small steps on their way to adult identity formation; both reluctantly take on highly demanding leader responsibilities. The fear they feel when they realize that they can no longer depend on adults, but have to shape their futures themselves, will be familiar to young readers on the threshold of adulthood. Losing friends and family, and leaving others behind are also part of coming of age.

The courtship motif so prevalent in narratives for young adults reflects the interests of young readers – this is the time in their lives when they are searching for a potential partner and are leaving their nuclear families to take on adult responsibility. The love story between Mara and Fox will resonate with readers. Mara, after giving birth to Fox’s daughter Lily, enters a romantic relationship

with Rowan, a childhood friend from Wing, creating another familiar scenario in young adult literature, the love triangle. These investigations of common young adult concerns – coming of age, searching for a love partner, and the formation of an adult identity – are central in the plot of the *Exodus Trilogy*, and help readers to become emotionally engaged in the story. Teachers should keep these factors in mind when choosing classroom literature.

One experience, which is hopefully not as familiar to the majority of teens is that of becoming a refugee. Here we find the greatest emotional impact of the story. The struggle for survival in a post-apocalyptic world with no safe harbor can seem overwhelming. But Bertagna's protagonists, as Curtis (2014, pp. 96–97) argues, focus on how groups of people with disparate aims and interests might manage to live together peacefully and build a politically inclusive community. In spite of the daunting vision of the future in this narrative, Curtis believes the trilogy “can awaken a desire in readers to think about the role they can play as young adults and the responsibilities they might have in creating a new world” (2014, p. 97). She points out that the contemporary young reader is given a time line: “twenty to thirty years from *Exodus*'s publication (when today's reader is an adult) political agreements will break down, and the seas will rise faster than expected” (2014, p. 93). Furthermore, “[t]hat time line gives the reader motivation, time, and an idea of what has failed. The reader is given tools to resist in her own world, modeled by Mara in her world” (2014, p. 93). As Ames (2013) points out, there is an educational potential in dystopian literature because it can succeed in engaging “apolitical” teens. Here we see the optimistic side of this dystopian tale, which can change the valence of environmental information from negative to positive. Readers, rather than sinking under the rising sea, can, like Mara, set out to survive and shape a new world. They can view current events in their world with new eyes, putting themselves in the situation of today's refugees and assessing the way they are being treated in harbors and at borders around the world. The teacher's job is to help pupils find the connections between the storyworld and their own world, relating discussions to goals in the core curriculum. They must help readers to slow down, taking time to question and reflect on what they reading, to facilitate deep learning.

Discussion

Recent research in the Nordic countries reveals that teacher trainees are not avid readers of literature in their native languages (Wicklund et al., 2016; Skaar et al., 2016). Presumably, this lack of priority of reading in their daily lives affects pre-service ESL teachers' reading of English literature as well. This is disconcerting in terms of reading as a basic skill, the teacher's role in modeling reading in the classroom and what we know about the importance of extensive reading in

relation to developing reading fluency (Krashen, 2004), language acquisition (Krashen, 1981; Waring, 2009) and the personal development of readers (Lazar, 2012; Collie & Slater, 1987). I argue here that teacher trainees would benefit from a process where they monitor their own reading history and reading habits, asking what kinds of narratives encourage them to read extensively and for personal development. An awareness of their own reading habits and what makes reading pleasurable may help them think through their role as reading models and how they can find literature that will engage their future ESL pupils.

In this connection, I have suggested that pre-service ESL teachers be introduced to narrative transportation theory and the role transportation into narrative worlds plays in terms of reading enjoyment. Understanding the mechanisms of transportation that lead to immersion in a story can help them see that reading for pleasure is not enough if our goal is deep learning. If teachers are to meet core curricular goals, they must help readers develop metacognitive reading strategies that can slow down the reading process, allowing for reflection, critical thinking and deep learning. This may help them to realize that reading strategies that lead to metacognition need not interfere with the “joy of reading” and motivate them to scaffold the reading of literature, facilitating metacognition.

Green, Brock and Kaufman (2004) maintain that being immersed in a narrative world can increase media enjoyment. This, however, depends on the quality of the work, the transportability of the reader/viewer and the reading situation itself. Teachers should keep in mind that pupils differ in terms of “transportability”. Not all readers in an ESL classroom will be able to engage with or enjoy longer literary texts. This may be due to language challenges, or the fact that pupils prefer to choose books themselves. Teachers should have other, linguistically simpler texts on hand for reluctant readers, or allow these pupils to find thematically similar texts. If teachers do choose a single book, they should keep in mind that the same book affects readers in different ways and facilitate classroom discussions where it is understood that there are no “correct” answers. For dyslectics or reluctant readers, graded readers, audio copies of books or filmed adaptations of books – texts in the expanded sense – may be advisable (See Williams, 2016 and Vicary, 2016, on choosing literature for teens in the ESL context).

Teachers aiming to promote the joy of reading in their ESL classrooms can use the insights of narrative transportation theory in selecting literary texts for the classroom. The theory points to a number of mechanisms in stories that must be triggered to facilitate transportation that teachers can look for. The story must be entertaining, so the reader’s thoughts are concentrated on what is going on. Readers should be able to identify with the characters, seeing similarities between their own lives and the lives of the protagonist(s). Seeing adolescents portrayed as active agents, shaping their own lives is also positive for young readers. The narratives should have strong, emotive imagery in order to engage

readers. However, these factors reduce counter-arguing, allowing implicit messages to slip into the reader's mind undetected. Teachers must therefore teach metacognitive reading strategies that help readers identify and think critically about these messages.

Finally, narrative transportation theory suggests that information and messages presented in a *storied* manner can be more persuasive than other advocacy messages (e.g. Prentice & Gerrig, 1999). In terms of working towards the core curricular goals of "Respect for nature and environmental awareness" and "Sustainable development", I argue that enjoyable stories like Bertagna's can get pupils to think about and discuss these topics from new perspectives. Further research should be done to find teenage literature that addresses other major goals in the Norwegian Core and English Subject Curricula. In this connection, I note that placing young protagonists in dystopian fictional worlds has been a recipe for success for many writers of young adult fiction during the past decades. Part of the attraction for teenage readers lies in the imagined destruction of the present world order, opening a creative space where they can construct alternative worlds and think critically about their own world.

Conclusion

If pre-service ESL teachers are to be prepared as *reading teachers* as well as language teachers, they need to be aware of their role as reading models. They also need to monitor and study their own reading history and present-day reading habits, reflecting on the psychological reading processes involved in pleasurable reading. Extensive ESL reading can hone reading fluency, language acquisition *and* personal growth among their pupils. Choosing literature that relates to value-laden curricular goals can help teachers work with central topics in new ways. However, texts, as we know, can also convey messages or attitudes that we do not condone or wish to transfer to our pupils. Teachers must evaluate the ideological perspectives in the texts they give pupils to read, regardless of genre, medium or popularity. They need to understand how narrative transportation works, not only in literature, but also in advertising, prose, journalism, etc., giving it cross-curricular importance. The narrative worlds we introduce our pupils to should relate to overarching curricular goals, instill the joy of reading in them, and lead to personal enrichment and deep learning.

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